

ROAD, TRACK & TRAIL MULTIDAY  
& ULTRA DISTANCE NEWS



// Issue 37

# ULTRARUNNING WORLD

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Cornish Personal Trainer Tracy Waite has kindly accepted the role of UW ambassador and is this edition's Guest editor.

**L**et us explore something a bit different in this issue with an article by John Burns, into what it means to extend your ultra-distance, mindfully. This topic resonates with me personally as an ultra-runner, but also as a personal trainer. It is an art that takes both, practice and discipline. "You can become mindful, present in the moment, or you can run for running's sake."

We would like to welcome Damian Hall to the issue with an in-depth interview about his life from school cross country, running his first marathon dressed as a toilet, to the well-known ultra-runner that he is now. His addictive personality aiding this healthy obsession which so many of us can relate to. In the words of Damian himself "Running is a mostly healthy addiction."

Alongside the usual news, podcast corner, race reports and ultrarunning enthusiasm that you expect to find, we have personal journals recalling experiences running Art O'Neill Ultra, Endurance Life, Northumberland Ultra, Darkside Runnings, Sunrise Ultramarathon and a handful of brutal "Track Wars" stories.

Two runners report from the same event WTF, Waterous Trails on Foot 2021, Nanga, Western Australia. Taking place in September, this race offers both 50 and 100-mile distances on MTB trails. Casey Edlington recalls her experience winning first female in the 50 miler, and Sam McCready's summary of the 100 mile and his shark hallucinations. Both incredible performances on what sounds like a tough but rewarding route. I for one have earmarked this as a future race to explore.

Andrew Meehan and Sarah Meegan share their individual experiences running Donadea 50km, a 10-lap forest track route in Co. Kildare. We hear how he uses the art of continually moving forward to make the finish line with Andrew, completing the race with 90 seconds to spare!

Dreams become reality for three women, Jaide Downs, Loran Cullen and Shamita Achenbach-König. Jadie recalls her gleeful screams, jumping and panic ensued, on entering "The Journey to the rock, 500km" before the panic hits, "how on earth does one train for 314 miles in Tennessee in July?" This is a wonderful nail-biting report on how a promise to her son Thaddius drove her forward to complete this monster of a challenge. We welcome Lorna back, since she wrote in issue 25 about "a dream to do a long distance self-supported run" and here she is preparing for her solo challenge to run JOGLE via the three peaks. Shamita tells us how she began her own 3100 journey on a 1km loop around a park in Vienna, Austria. Reading these reports, I am reminded of the words by Francesca Goodwin, "being ordinary is brave, being ordinary is resilient, being ordinary is extraordinary."

I challenge you readers to ask yourself what challenge you would like to take on? Is it a local race, or perhaps one that is featured here? Or is it simply to connect deeper with the trails and nature as you are running, and to ditch those earphones for a while? Whatever your goal, I hope this read inspires you to chase it.

#### The House:

##### • Editor

- Abichal Sherrington

##### • Staff

- Ana Sanchez

- Helen Hayes

- Sarah Thi

- Sophie Bennett

##### • Ambassador

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##### • Front cover

Eventual winner, Budjargal Byambaa on Day 3 at the Sri Chinmoy 6 Day Race 2022. Photo by [srichinmoyultraphoto.com](http://srichinmoyultraphoto.com)

##### • Back cover

Carol Morgan at Moot Hall after completing the 214 fells, described by Alfred Wainwright in his Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells, on 14th May 2022. Photo by Debs White.

#### Graphic Designer

Editorial Assistant

Copy Editor

Book Reviewer

Guest Editor

## Ultrarunning World May - June 2022

### • Correspondents

Sarah Cameron

Gary Dudney

Tim Hardy

Helen Hayes

Helen Pike

Sharon Gayter

Antonio Codina

Annabel Hepworth

Daniel Walker

Gareth Chadwick

Naomi Moss

Send inquiries, original and previously unpublished race reports/articles to the email address below. Last dates for article submissions: July 14<sup>th</sup> and August 14<sup>th</sup>. Please include some accompanying photos (if you have any) with articles/race reports, a 40-50 word bio, and a headshot for the contributors page. More details for submissions on request. Thank you.

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Address: 38 Shadwell Rd, Bristol, BS7 8EP

Phone Number: 07923833719

Website: [Ultrarunningworld.co.uk](http://Ultrarunningworld.co.uk)

Email: [mail@ultrarunningworld.co.uk](mailto:mail@ultrarunningworld.co.uk)





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# News



The **2022 IAU 100km World Championships** are scheduled for Bernau bei Berlin, Germany on August 27<sup>th</sup>. The event also includes the **WMA 100km World Championships** and there is no open event.

The **23rd IAU 24-hour European Championships** on 17/18 September takes place along with an open 24 hour at the 28th edition of **Lupatotissima** in Verona, Italy. The event usually includes a relay, 12 and 6 hour options which will return in 2023.

The inaugural **World Mountain and Trail Running Championships (WMTRC)**, are to be held in Chiang Mai from November 3-6 2022, organized by a partnership of the World Mountain Running Association, the International Association of Ultrarunners and the International Trail Running Association. The event will officially be called the **Amazing Thailand World Mountain and Trail Running Championships 2022**. The **1st IAU 50km European Championships** will be held in Sotillo de Adrada, Avila, Spain on October 8th 2022.

The **2022 IAU 24 Americas Championship** in São Paulo in Brazil will now take place 13th November 2022 rather than its original date in September.

The ratification of several records has taken place including Alexander Sorokin's 12 Hour distance of 177,410 km at **Spartanion** in January 2022 and his 24 Hour World Record of 309,339 km set at **Ultra-Park Weekend** in August 2021. Sorokin broke his own 100 mile world record of 11:14:56 by reducing it to 10:51:39 en route to his 12 hour WR. Sorokin also set a new World record at 6 hours of 98.496 km at the **Centurion Track 100 race** in April surpassing Don Ritchie's record and at the same event set a new 100km World record of 6:05:41.



The 2023 World Mountain and Trail Running Championships (WMTRC) will take



place in the Tyrol in Austria. The community of Innsbruck-Stubai will host the WMTRC at the beginning of June. [Full article on IATR.](#)

**GOMU**, the Global Organisation of Multiday Running has announced that in addition to its inaugural 2022 **48 Hour World Championships** at the **Hainesport Endurance Run** on September 3rd, the 2023 48 Hour World Championships will take place at the **Gloucester 48 Hour Race** hosted by Severn Valley Events. There will also be another first in modern times, the **GOMU 6 Day World Championships** which will take place at the **Italian Ultra Marathon Festival** in Policoro 2023.

### New Records

Recent National records set include Patrycja Bereznowska (POL) who ran 403,32083 km to set a new 48 hour world record at **Poland's UltraPark Weekend**, host to more record ultra performances this weekend including Andrzej Piotrowski who set a new Polish men's 24 Hour National Record with 282.201km (175.351 miles), 6th best all-time at **24 hours** and **Jiri Horcick** set a new Czech record for 24 hours with 267.108 km. [Full results.](#)



Jirko Mustard set a new Czech record for 24 hours, with 267,10854 km!

VXO Ultrafest hosted Sweden's 24 Hour National Championship on April 24th. Erik Olofsson won the race with 266.587km (165.649 miles). His exciting sprint at the end allowed him to set a new National Record by 60 meters..

John Stocker wins the 2022 **Thames Ring 250** in 59:51:32. First woman was Ellen Cottom in 82:00:52. [Full results](#)

Starting out on May the 2<sup>nd</sup> from Moot Hall John Kelly broke the record for a continuous round of the **Wainwrights** completing the summing of 214 Lakeland tops, 515km, and 36,000ft of ascent in 5 days, 12 hours, 14 minutes, and 42 seconds 11 hours faster than the previous record set by Sabrina Verjee in June 2021.

In May back cover ultrarunner Carol Morgan completed her round of the Wainwright Fells, in 6 days 10hrs 43mins 45secs, the second-fastest by a woman, and fifth fastest overall.

Camille Herron set a new **Strolling Jim** Course Record in 4:44:01 and Courtney Dauwalter and Jim Walmsley set new course records at **MUIT** 14:40:35, and 12:58:27 respectively.

Also on the 14th of May **Backyard Ultras** saw a new record set in Rettert Germany, **The Race of the Champions - Backyard Masters** breaking Harvey Lewis's record set in October 2021. Merijn Geerts (BEL) ran 90 yards, 603.500 km with the assist of Keith Russell (IRL).

4<sup>th</sup> of June saw Samantha Hudson Amend win outright the **Grand Union Canal Race 2022** setting a new women's course record in 23:45.



We are delighted to welcome Tracy Waite onboard as a new ambassador for Ultrarunning World. Tracy is based in Hayle in Cornwall and works as a Personal Trainer. She also offers support to the local community through her CIC, [the waite room](#), to members that have a physical and/or mental difficulty and/or those feeling isolated, preventing them from leading an active life in Hayle and the surrounding area.

As well as being an ultrarunner Tracy also organised the [Cornwall Run Show](#) in April this year along with Bys Vyken Events as a joint collaboration, bringing together different aspects of the Cornwall running scene as well as folk from farther afield such as Film My Run creator Stephen Cousins. The event was such a success it will be back at Heartlands, Pool on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2023.



8th april 2023  
heartlands, pool

## Recent Races

### 01/04/2022 1. SLO24 - 24h Slovenian National Championship 24h Koper SLO

Taking place in Koper in the Slovenian southwest on a 963.06m flat tartan loop, Luka Videtic became the National Champion at 24 hours by covering 257.130 km. The Women's Champion was Andreja Jesenko with 132.900 km. [Full results](#) on the race website.



### 01/04/2022 Dublin 2 Belfast Ultra 173km Dublin IRL

The Dublin 2 Belfast Ultra is a road race that starts at 12 noon at St James Gate and finishes at the Europa Hotel in Belfast. The cut-off is 30 hours. This year there were 31 finishers with only two women, Justine Flett (ENG) and Erin Kelly (IRL) and it was Erin who reached the finish first completing the distance in 25:38:31. First man was James Bennett (GBR) who finished in 19:27:59. [Results on the DUV](#).

### 02/04/2022 3rd Northern Traverse 300/100km 289km St. Bees ENG

The 100km race starts with the SILVA Northern Traverse in St. Bees and crosses the Lake District, finishing in Shap. Runners have 28 hours to complete the distance. First home was Daniel Weller (USA) in 11:05:46 and first woman was Katie Kaars Sijpesteijn (GBR) just 2 minutes behind with 11:07:21. 128 finishers. The Northern Traverse follows one of Britain's most popular long distance paths starting in St Bees on the west coast crossing the north of England through three National Parks and finishing in Robin Hood's Bay on the east coast. Both winners set course records with Kim Collison (GBR) finishing in 44:24:30 and Lisa Watson (GBR) taking some 10 hours off the previous women's best time to finish in 52:52:57. Links to [both sets of results](#) can be found on the race website.

### 03/04/2022 Sri Chinmoy Self Transcendence 100/50k race 100km Perth SCO

Just a bit farther north, North Inch Park, Perth was host to the Sri Chinmoy Self Transcendence 100/50k races which also served as the British 100k Championships and the Anglo-Celtic Plate team trophy. The course is a flat 2.381 km traffic free loop. The 100k was won by Matthew Dickinson in 6:39:34 and the first woman was Joanna Murphy in 7:41:12, both course records and we will have an interview with Joanna in the next edition of the magazine. [Race report by Arpita Stott](#). Full results at [my.raceresult.com](http://my.raceresult.com).

### 06/04/2022 2nd Irrational S.O.U.T.H. 200 Miler 200mi Murray Bridge, SA AUS

A 200 mile race From the historic River Port city of Murray Bridge following the Lavender Federation Trail. This year's race was won by Melissa Robertson in 62:03:14. First man was Matthew Woodman 63:48:07, second overall. 10 M, 15 F finishers. [Full results](#) on the race website.

### 18/04/2022 22nd Sri Chinmoy 6 Day Race 6d New York, NY USA

A 10 hour storm welcomed the runners to Flushing Meadow Park in Queens, New York on the first day of the 6 day race which took place without the usual 10 day race this year. After establishing a 50k lead over Andrea Marcato, eventual race winner, front cover runner Budjargal Byambaa (MGL) finished with 808.373 km. The women's race was a lot closer with Susan Marshall (NZL) leading at the end of Day 1 but Annabel Hepworth (AUS) took the lead by the end of the second day which she was to hold until the final night when Susan Marshall surged into the lead to claim the victory with 711.812 km. [Race report by Sahishnu](#) and results on [SriChinmoyRaces.org](http://SriChinmoyRaces.org).

### 23/04/2022 K6 6d Konstantinovy Lázně CZE

A new addition to the 6 day race calendar K6 was based in the Czech Republic at Konstantinovy Lázně which lies 106 km west of Prague. The event also included 48, 24 and 100km events. The course is a 3km paved loop with 12m of elevation. The 6 day saw Daniel Brazdil (CZE) win with 628.242 km and the first woman was Edda Bauer (GER) with 430.909 km. 11 finishers. In the 48 hour Michal Cinciala (CZE) was first with 297.083 km and the only woman was Bettina Esemann (CZE) finishing with 162.678 km. The 24 hour was won by Lenka Barochova (CZE) with 206.265 km and first man was Vitek Slupsky (CZE) with 203.162 km. [Results on the race website](#).



**23/04/2022 Centurion Track 100 100m+ Bedford ENG**

The Centurion Track 100 is an elite level event held at the Bedford International Athletics Stadium, designed with a focus on record setting. The main event is the 100 mile distance, with ratifiable splits taken at 50km, 50 mile, 100km, 6 and 12 hours on route.

The field included three World class runners Camille Herron (USA) and Dominika Stelmach (POL) and Aleksandr Sorokin (LTU) who set several World, Continental and National Age Group Bests. Sorokin set a new 6 hour World record of 98.496km on his way to a new 100 km World record of 6:05:41 also setting a new National 50km record. Camille set a new USATF FV40 record of 7:39 and all told 20 World, National and Age group records were set.

Alex Whearity won the 100 miler in 12:42:04 and Sam Amend set a new 12 hour British record of 140.310km and saw a big improvement on her own British 100 mile record of 14:10:51. Wheelchair racer Claudia Burrough set a new British Women 100 mile time of 14:44:13. Centurion race report, [Results](#).

**23/04/2022 Madeira Island Ultra Trail 115 km POR**

The Madeira Island Ultra Trail (MIUT) is a Portuguese ultramarathon that crosses Madeira Island from Porto Moniz to Machico. Featuring five different events with distances 16, 42, 60, 85 and 116km, MIUT is part of the Ultra Trail World Tour. The 115km event saw Jim Walmsley (USA) in 12:58:14 and Courtney Dauwalter (USA) in 14:40:35 set course records – Jim by just over an hour and Courtney by some 2:38 minutes in a field of 550 runners. The 85km race was won by Tom Evans (GBR) in 8:46:35 and the first woman was Kelly Wolf (USA) 10:58:54. Over 60 k-m Noel Giordano (FRA) triumphed in 6:03:19 and the first woman was Sheila Aviles Castano (ESP) in 6:39:27. Results on the race website [MIUTmadeira.com](#)

**27/04/2022 8th Thames Ring 250 Miles 250 mi Streatley-on-Thames ENG**

The Thames Ring 250 is a 250 mile trail race starting in Streatley-on-Thames and follows an anti-clockwise loop East along the Thames, the Grand Union Canal, the Oxford canal and back to Streatley - almost entirely on canal and riverside paths and relatively flat. Leading from the start John Stocker finished the race in 59:51:32 while Ellen Cottom was first woman finishing in 81:58:30. 26 starters and 14 finishers. [Full results](#)

**01/05/2022 The Namib Race (Namibia) 250km/6 stages Swakopmund NAM**

Namib Race (Namibia) is a 7-day, 250-kilometre / 155-mile self-supported footrace located in the Namib Desert in the Skeleton Coast National Park, hosted by RacingThePlanet. Reinhold Hugo (SUI) was the men's winner in 25:05:01 and the Women's winner was Vicky Connelly (GBR) in 34:09:30. [Results on the race website](#).

**02/05/2022 2nd Cocodona 250 Mile Race 250 mi Black Canyon City AZ USA**

Cocodona 250 in Arizona saw Joe McConaughy take the win in 2:11:31:00 and Annie Hughes was first woman third overall in 2:23:13:00. [Results](#).

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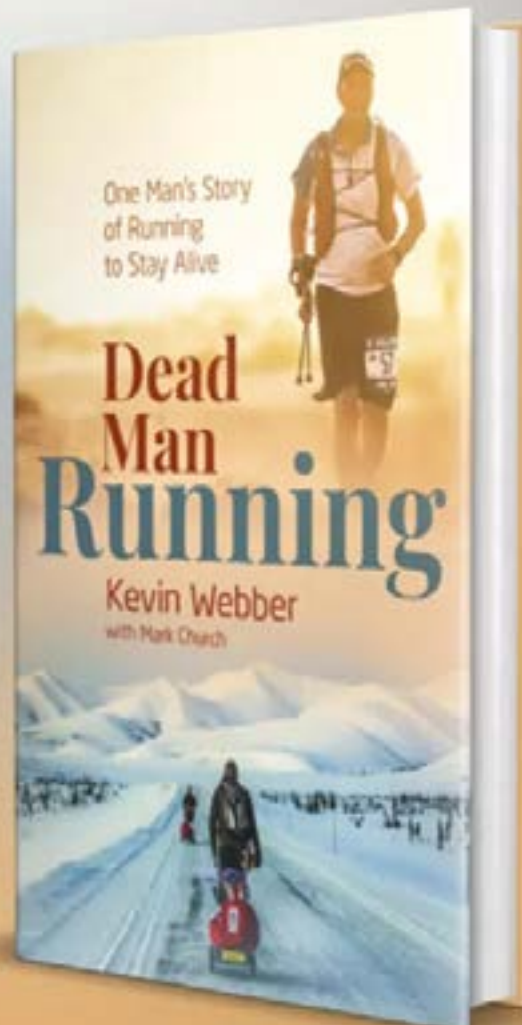
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# Podcast Corner



[Ultrarunning News](#) talks to Patrycja Bereznowska who set a new 48 hour world record at the Ultra Park Weekend in Poland and with Andrzej Piotrowski who broke the Polish 24-hour record. Plus Merijn Geerts (BEL) last one standing at The Race of the Champions - Backyard Masters in Germany with a new backyard ultra record of 90 hours along with his assist, Keith Russell (IRL).

[GottaRunRacing Ultra Running Podcast](#) Episode 34 Jodi and Norm talk to Van Phan.

[Run to the Hills - Episode 82](#) Edwina Sutton and Gary Thwaites talk with Lizzy Hawker RD of the Ultra Tour Monte Rosa.

[Running with Jake PLODcast](#)

Trevor Lee Cornwall Running Show - live interviews, book sales, great stands.... [Running 44@60 - tips, ideas and advice for your first ultra marathon](#)



Centurion Running Podcast [Women in Ultrarunning](#) James is joined by Sophie Power of She Races, Sarah Cameron a Centurion Coach and Nici Griffin a Centurion RD to discuss a range of topics related to increasing and improving the quality of women's participation in Ultrarunning.

[Tartan Running Shorts podcast](#) is the go to podcast for running in Scotland. Hosted by GB International trail runner Kyle Greig and club runner Tom Brian, episode 173 is a debrief after the Self-Transcendence 100/50k/ACP in Perth.

[Outlandish](#) is a new podcast by Ed Scott focusing on the burgeoning trail running scene in Southeast England.

The first episode features Chris Bradley the founder and director of Runaway Adventures.

The Women's Running podcast - Every week on the award winning Women's Running podcast, Esther and Holly talk about all things running, women, health and fitness with their own brand of happy, irreverent chat. [Ep 97. Running as punishment, sport addiction, disordered eating, psychology.](#)

The Running Hub hosted by Katie Tucker and James Down, online running coaches from Milton Keynes. [How To Prepare For Your Next Training Block - Episode 106](#)

Trail and ultra running from Wild Ginger Running. [New gear on test May 2022, Inov-8 Parkclaw G 280, Montane windproof, Garmin 245, 1000 Mile socks](#)



Running Conversations. Real-life Stories From Women Who Run hosted by Founder Leanne Davies and Co-owner of [Run Mummy Run](#) Becs Richardson.

Becoming Ultra is following the journey's of two runners who are being coached by two of the best ultra runners in the world to finish a 50k in Aspen Colorado. The catch is that neither runner has ever run more than a half marathon. This episode, [My First Ultra: 52 features Jameelah Abdul-Rahim Mujaahid.](#)

[Mike Horner.](#) Living An Ultra Life: How running can help you overcome obstacles. Ten years ago, chaos erupted in multiple areas of my life, creating a "perfect storm" strong enough to kill most of my hopes and dreams. Running helped me begin to dream again. [Strong Women Run Ultras! Interview with Coach Dani Filipek](#)

The Mindful Runner way for Trail and Ultra runners. Hosted by Fred Richardson, ultra runner, founder and head coach at Mindful Runner. Training wisdom, news, interviews and reviews on gear, running destinations and ultra racing in South Africa. This episode is called [Training With Power.](#)

Uphill Athlete Podcast [Interview With Ultra Running Phenom, Clare Gallagher.](#)

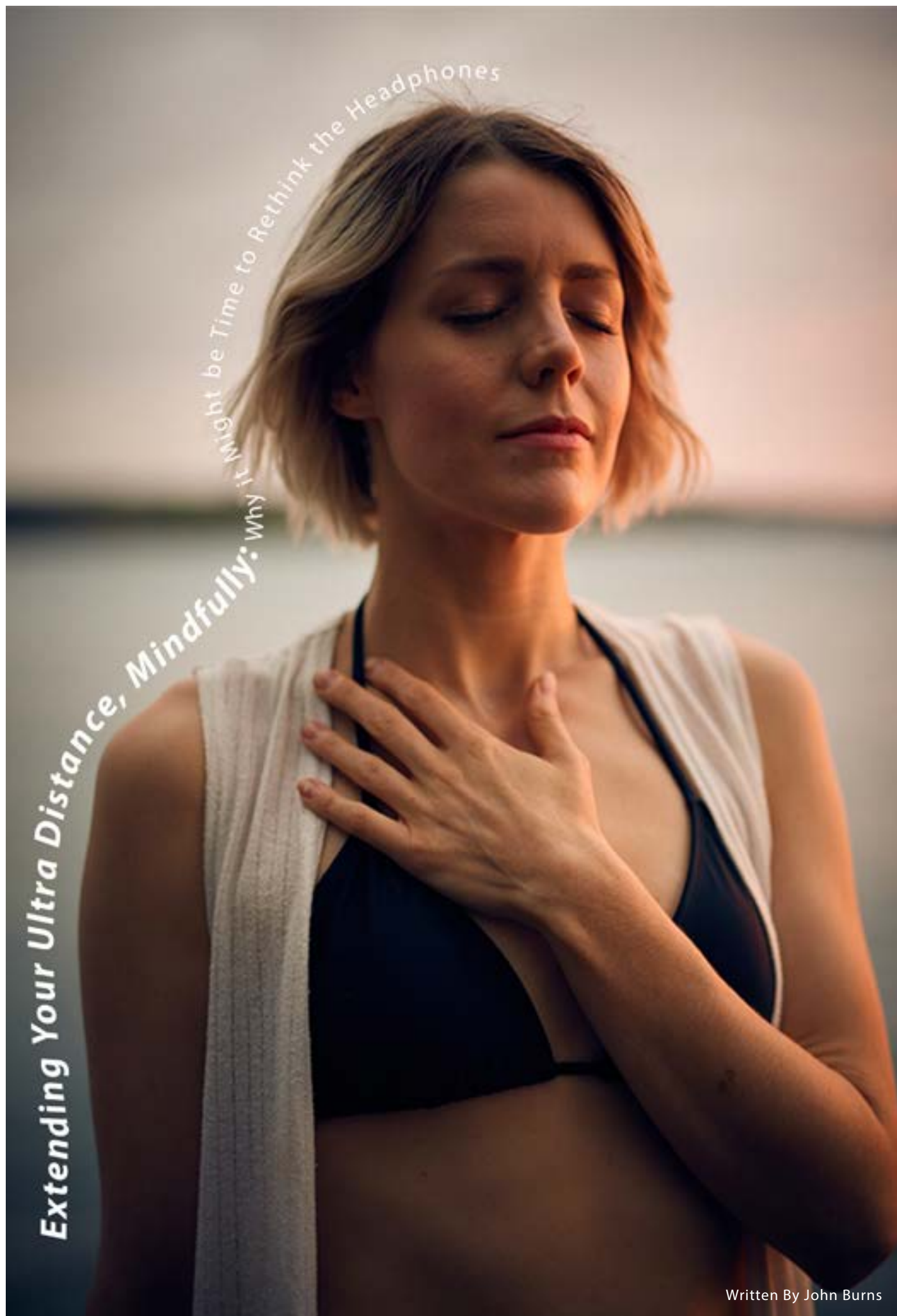
The Rich Roll Podcast: [Courtney Dawalter: Mindset Secrets From The World's Best Ultrarunner](#)

Nutrition For Ultra Endurance Cycling & Running Events - TrainRight Podcast

Trail and Error Podcast Episode 33 Centurion Running Thames Path 100 - Race Special Tris takes on the Thames Path 100 which follows the famous river's banks from the heart of London to Oxford.



Forthcoming book [Where There's a Hill](#) Sabrina Verjee. One woman, 214 Lake District fells, four attempts, one record-breaking Wainwrights run. Out 15<sup>th</sup> Sep 2022.



**Extending Your Ultra Distance, Mindfully: Why it Might be Time to Rethink the Headphones**

Written By John Burns



There's something special about cranking up the music and letting your feet do their stuff. The right music enhances your mood, turning a familiar route into a new adventure – a new set of emotions to be explored. Music can guide your tempo, pumping you full of adrenaline and giving you the strength to push that little bit harder for that little bit longer. It's motivating too – your favourite artist drops a new album? Stick those headphones on and get out for a run.

The science backs this up. Music essentially overrides the natural chemical processes in our body, firing up the fight-or-flight mechanism even when neither fight nor flight is required. When stimulated by a particularly resonant track, the brain releases adrenaline and cortisol, flooding the muscles with oxygen and increasing the power in your legs. That sudden feeling of invincibility when the good part of a track kicks in? You're not imagining it – this is your brain giving you a handy boost.

Even mournful, down-tempo tunes can give us a boost. A joint study from Durham University and the University of Jyväskylä found that sad music can provide positive feelings of sorrow – namely "comforting sorrow" and "sweet sorrow" according to the study – for many listeners, something that could turn even the most grueling of Tuesday morning winter runs into a profound philosophical experience.

All of this is great for short, powerful sessions, giving you the strength and positivity you need to keep on pushing. It's also highly effective over longer distances, keeping you engaged with your run as the miles tick by.

But what about as the hours tick by? What happens after you've been running for two hours, three hours, five hours, ten hours? Chances are the music is starting to wear a bit thin. Now, you're looking for sustainability in terms of pace and form, rather than short, sharp chemical bursts from deep in your brain.

You might turn to something else. Perhaps an audiobook or a great podcast. A long run might just be the perfect time for making a dent in that work of literature you've had on your mind for some time now. An ultra-distance run provides ample time to make headway on *The Luminaries* or *The Goldfinch*, or one of the other mega-works of our age.

And how about podcasts? How about broadening the mind as you run, learning something, stimulating cognitive processes while we get the miles in – thinking, laughing, agreeing your way towards your weekly mileage targets.

But perhaps this is missing the point. All of these stimuli – music, audiobooks, podcasts, lectures, radio plays, comedy sets – it all boils

down to the same thing. Distraction. We are seeking to distract ourselves from the action of running, from the pain and sometimes – truth be told – drudgery that comes from ultra-distance training. By distracting ourselves in this way, we are leaving ourselves exposed and vulnerable. After all, what happens when the distraction doesn't quite do the job anymore?

You love running, and you wouldn't do it if you didn't. You love the feeling of getting out there, putting miles under your feet, challenging yourself, and then receiving the payoff of success, surprising yourself by going further, going faster, doing more than you ever thought possible.

But this doesn't mean you love every aspect of running. A challenge wouldn't be a challenge if it wasn't difficult. Training would be redundant if there weren't obstacles to overcome. And so a little distraction here and there is very welcome indeed.

It's when distraction becomes a crutch that problems begin to arise. We've all felt the panic of misplaced headphones ahead of a long run, or of a sudden technical failure that cuts off the audio midway through the session. We've all felt the sickness, the feeling of nakedness and vulnerability that comes with this. We've all felt doubt seeping in – what if I can't do this alone? What if I need Donna Tartt or the Kings of Leon to carry me through?

Concepts of mindfulness, of being present in the moment, get a bad press. We might associate these concepts with shortsighted comments about how 'things were so much better in the '40s before everyone had mobile phones', or with #blessed influencers living their best lives on exotic beaches. But let's put all this to one side for a minute. In fact, mindfulness is not just a handy buzzword to drop into conversation with your ultra-running crew, it's a practical necessity for anyone who wants to push the distance in a meaningful way.

Distance running always involves a psychological battle. Run a strong full or half-marathon and there will be moments when you wonder if you can sustain this pace for the whole distance, moments when you wonder if body and mind can handle it. However, run a strong full or half-marathon, and you're going to be finished in a few hours. Win those key psychological skirmishes, and you're well on your way. It's still hard work, but the time parameters are more manageable.

It's a little different in an ultra-marathon. Difficult terrain, masses of ascent and descent, and extreme distances can see runners out on the trail for mind-boggling amounts of time. The internal psychological to-ing and fro-ing is not only magnified – it is extended, stretched out over hour after hour. There's going to come a time when, no matter how well you've physically conditioned yourself,

the tunes, the sparkling prose, the stimulating conversation, are no longer enough. And then, well... then you're on your own.

You can train for this. You can overcome this self-doubt, the sudden black hole of realising you've still got X-amount of miles and an indefinite number of hours left to go. You can become mindful, present in the moment. You can run for running's sake.

This means ditching the headphones. Not permanently, or even completely, but simply getting used to running out there in the world, stimulated only by the action of running, by the sights and sounds all around you, and by your own thoughts.

It can be nerve-wracking to do this. So many of us – myself included – have built up such a dependency on these artificial stimuli that turning our back on them feels scary. The proposition may also be unpleasant – it's fun to listen to music when you run, it's fun to tune into an audiobook as you leg it up and down hills. Why deny yourself this pleasure?

Think of it as conditioning. You're conditioning yourself to enjoy running and to enjoy the action of running. You're also conditioning yourself to enjoy music and other audio the way it was intended, not merely as a distraction but instead as something engaging and exciting. You're conditioning yourself to break free of dependency.

You may decide to take the headphones with you but leave them unplugged for as long as you can. That hit of adrenaline and cortisol is very, very real – the science has told us this – and rationing it out can be highly effective. Something I have done personally is set myself a "silence target" – a specific mileage I need to hit before I plug in the 'phones and press play. Knocking off 20 miles on a 30 mile trail run in a state of mindfulness is made all the better by the knowledge that you've got a secret weapon in your back pocket. And the sudden hit of energy and strength when you do finally plug in? Wow. Those final couple of hours become joyous.

Essentially, we're talking about gaining control. If you know you can run – just run – alone with your thoughts, and do just fine, you're going to find it far easier to push yourself as the miles begin to stack up. This is crucial to ultra-running success, regardless of your own level or your personal goals.

But there are other benefits too, beyond performance and tenacity. Seeing an eagle suddenly rise up from the brush and soar on a thermal, do you reckon a moment like this needs a Motown accompaniment? A blood-red sunrise creeping over the far horizon at the end of a nighttime session – enhanced by the words of Hanya Yanagihara, or not?

And there'll be countless more things out there – less dramatic things you might not

even have noticed. The stillness of a forest trail in the early morning with no one about. The whistle of the wind coming down from the ridge and settling in the trees. These moments can be transcendental – truly life-affirming snapshots of the landscape, made even more beautiful by their fragility and their ephemeral nature. The meditative state of distance running becomes even easier to achieve as you become present – genuinely present – in the moment.

Perhaps this doesn't appeal. Maybe this is all becoming a bit "pseud's corner". Well, let's put the brakes on and focus on the practicalities. By training yourself to be present in the moment as you run, you are expanding the possibilities in terms of distance and performance. This alone is good enough reason to give it a try.

Don't go throwing away those headphones just yet. Just consider unplugging them every once in a while, or even leaving them behind when you head out for an hour or two. You might be amazed by what you can do all by yourself, and they'll always be there for you when you want to blast that feel-good playlist.





A photograph of three ultra-runners in mid-air, jumping over a gravel path. The runner on the left is a woman wearing a red vest and blue shorts, with bib number 40. The runner in the middle is a man wearing a blue shirt and black shorts, with bib number 8. The runner on the right is a man wearing a white shirt and blue shorts, with bib number 48. They are all wearing backpacks and running shoes. The background shows green trees and a clear sky.

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Damian Hall is one of the UK's finest ultrarunners and running coaches, with a string of impressive results to his name, from fifth place at UTMB to FKTs for the iconic Pennine Way and Coast to Coast long-distance trails. He spoke to Gareth Chadwick about training, running and drinking too much.



# HALL OF FAME: *Damian Hall*

*Written by Gareth Chadwick*

Damian Hall never intended to be a runner. Certainly not an ultrarunner. A few promising cross country podiums at school soon gave way to 20 years of amateur soccer and a career in adventure journalism.

It was only a suggestion from a colleague that turned him onto running, when he ran the Bath Half Marathon in 2011, aged 35. It was his first competitive race since school and he loved it. Not only did he love it, he found out he was actually quite good at it too, especially when he discovered trail running.

"I was really into long-distance hiking. I loved being out in glorious lumps, sometimes for days on end, and it being hard work physically, but always hugely rewarding at the end. The buzz from trail running was similar. I thought, it's like hiking but it's even better when you go a bit faster!" he says.

The year after his debut in Bath, he ran his first marathon, dressed as a toilet, and his first ultramarathon, The Wall, a 70-mile jaunt

through Hadrian's Wall country. He'd found his mojo. And some mojo it turned out to be. By 2016, he was in the GB trail running team, placing on the podium in some serious ultras and setting FKTs.

"2016 was my breakthrough year," he says. "I was second at the UK Ultra Trail Championships at the Highland Fling, achieved my first FKT, the South West Coast Path, and a top 20 finish in the 106-mile Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc (UTMB). That was after about four years into the sport, without many pauses through injury."

By his own admission, he can be a little obsessive in certain aspects of his life. He was an obsessive football fan when younger. He obsessively listens to the same music. He tends to eat the same group of favourite foods every day. It's a trait he's become more aware of as he's got older, and one that has stood him in good stead in terms of training and preparation.



"I suppose when it comes to training, the people that can get up at five or six in the morning, day after day, whatever the weather, year after year, are going to be the fitter ones. A lot of the top ultrarunners I've met over the past few years, people like John Kelly and Nicky Spinks, there's a level of obsession there. A focus on the detail. They're both a bit more organised and analytical than I am, but it comes from the same place," he says.

Like all of us, when races were cancelled during lockdown in 2020, Damian suddenly found himself staring at an empty calendar. He put his free time to good use by switching his attention to some of the UK's iconic long-distance races.

He had already set records on the 630-mile South West Coast Path and the 61-mile Paddy Buckley Round in Wales in previous years. Next on his list was the Pennine Way, a 268-mile route from Kirk Yetholm in the Scottish Borders down to Edale in the Peak District.

Hall blitzed the trail over a seemingly uneventful 2.5 days in July





2020. He broke the existing fastest known time (FKT), set by Bristol-based US ultrarunner John Kelly just a week earlier, by three hours. He even found time to pick up litter along the way, in line with his strong environmental beliefs. As it turned out, the record was relatively short lived as Kelly returned to the route nine months later to reclaim the FKT.

In 2021, Hall set his sights on the Coast to Coast trail, a 185-mile route across the north of England, from St Bees Head on the Cumbrian coast, through three national parks (Lake Dis-

trict, Yorkshire Dales and North Yorkshire Moors), to end on the North Yorkshire coast at Robin Hood's Bay. It was a record held by legendary long distance runner Mike Hartley, who had held the original Pennine Way record for 30 years, a fact not lost on Hall.

"Mike Hartley was an amazing runner with an unbelievable legacy. He set all these records for long-distance trails across the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s that have only been beaten in the last couple of years or so. So although the Coast to Coast might not have the profile

of something like the Bob Graham Round or the Pennine Way, the fact it had Mike's name attached to it gave it that extra prestige for me," he says.

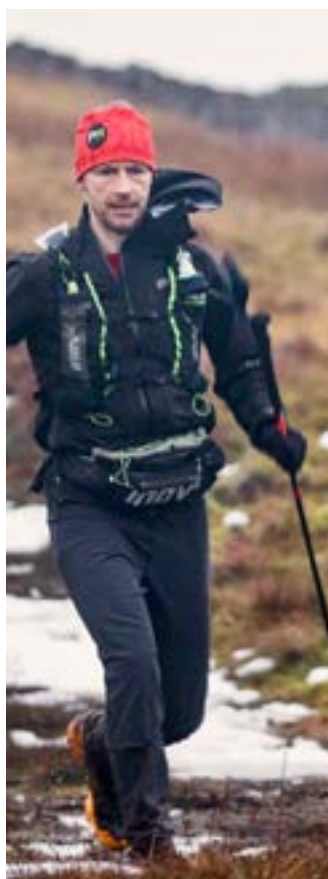
He set off at 6am on 25 May 2021 in his inov-8 Terraultra G 270. All went well for the first day and he found himself around two hours up on the record as he passed through Kirkby Stephen.

"The Lakes were great. Mostly the weather was kind and there was a tiny bit of hail and showers, but it was cool and sunny mostly," he says.

As he moved into night running, however, he began to suffer with tiredness and a few stomach issues. These got worse as he crossed through the Dales, and by the time he reached the North Yorkshire Moors – the last high ground before heading down to the Northumberland coast – there were clear signs of trouble. He felt increasingly confused and unsteady, having to be steadied and picked up by crew members on more than one occasion. He also recalls being convinced he was off course and wondering who all the people were that were running with them.

"People have told me I was behaving like a drunken toddler. I was fractious, stubborn. I felt generally very confused. I tried to remove a mid-layer at one point without taking my top layer off," he recalls.

In hindsight, having spoken to various experts and his crew, he thinks he got into a state of hyponatremia – excessive fluid intake – which



can be fatal.

"I usually get a bit dehydrated on these things. But this time I was keen to hydrate optimally and possibly did simply take on too much. This was made worse by the fact that about halfway through, when I felt a bit bloated, I decided to cut out electrolytes in case they were contributing to my stomach issues. I intended to restart on them, but forgot. So, there was insufficient sodium being replaced. Things started to get a bit weird a few hours after that," he says.

Fortunately, his crew, which included a doctor, were able to make sure he was okay and keep him on schedule over the final few miles. He finally made it down to the beach at Robin's Hood Bay after 1 day 15 hours and 18 minutes of running, beating the record by just 18 minutes.

Other than the fluid intake and electrolytes, is there anything he would do differently?

"I've always been quite a conservative pacer, and that's usually served me well. But I'm increas-

ingly curious about starting a bit more strongly and holding on and seeing if that is faster overall or not. I was experimenting with that, I was pushing a bit more than I might normally, early on. I don't think that contributed to my troubles, but you can never be completely sure," says Hall.

In terms of training, he very much follows the philosophy of his coach, David Roche, of quality over quantity. His main focus during training is on improving running economy – essentially trying to make your easy pace faster and faster paces easier. He generally runs between 60 and 80 miles a week. Around four to six weeks out from a race or a challenge, he will get more specific in his training, which usually means spending more time in the hills.

"I totally believe in the approach that you should feel good most of the time. Being fatigued isn't a validation of good training. In fact, it's the opposite," he says.

After his success on the Coast to Coast trail, Damian was aiming to beat his 2018 fifth place at the UTMB in August 2021. Unfortunately, troubled by a calorie deficit, stomach issues and a painful knee, he was forced to drop out of the race close to the halfway point – his first DNF.

The disappointment was repeated at this year's Spine Race in January, when he was forced to retire through injury over 180 miles into the 268-mile challenge along the Pennine Way. He had a lead of four hours over the nearest chasers at the time of his retirement.

With more than 10 years of success already under his belt, however, it will take more than a couple of temporary setbacks to dim his enthusiasm for the ultrarunning. And with Covid-19 restrictions loosening all over the world, it surely won't be long before he's back on a podium somewhere.

"Running is a mostly healthy addiction. I love the sense of freedom. I love getting muddy. I love the competitive side. I love that it can be a solo or a team thing. I love that it enables adventures, and I love that it legitimises the intake of more cake," says Damian. Amen to that.





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# Waterous Trail on Foot

*Written by Casey Edlington*

WTF is a trail ultra-marathon, located in the beautiful town of Dwellingup, 45 minutes south east of Perth. It is organised by Dave Kennedy and his gorgeous family each year over the September long weekend. The race has been running for ten years and the course has undergone several changes. The course had a significant change from 2020 to 2021, where I was overjoyed to place first female, third overall in both of these races.

The WTF race is like no other here in Western Australia. My two children are blessed with two running parents and thus they are involved in many races. However, WTF is the one race where they will willingly get up at 3am, eat breakfast in the car, endure the chilly start line and look forward to sharing the day digging holes, playing in the mud, finding sticks and cheering on the runners with new friends.

The 2021 WTF course is not for the faint hearted.

As someone who has run two courses, I can attest that this race has everything.

The 82km event is made up of three adjoining loops, all coming back to the Nanga Bush Camp. Leg One can fondly be described as the "hilly loop". You are lulled into this gorgeous relatively flat 9km stretch, when the sun is still coming up, the fog is subsiding and the ex-

citement is high. And then comes "Dead but rising". A gnarly, intense 1.3km long hill, with 200m elevation which takes you to my absolute favourite spot: The power lines. After a few short climbs, we go on a technical detour, through flowing rivers, rutted hills and into the unknown. And then when you get back down to the bottom, you get to do the "Dead but Rising" loop again! Then we head back to Nanga, taking Leg One to a total of 29km and 1,100m of elevation gain.

By this point, many runners are questioning their life choices. However, I find Leg One to be my favourite, as I do love a bit of intense hill climbing. Then we move onto Leg Two. This one involves some wisdom. It's really important to not thrash your legs early on, as this section has a bit of everything. It is 33km with 700m of elevation gain. You begin this section, with lactic acid already in your legs and thus begins the punishing, yet stunning, undulating bike paths of the Munda Biddi. This stretch has hairpin turns, road crossings, random signs and gorgeous scenery. Oh, and

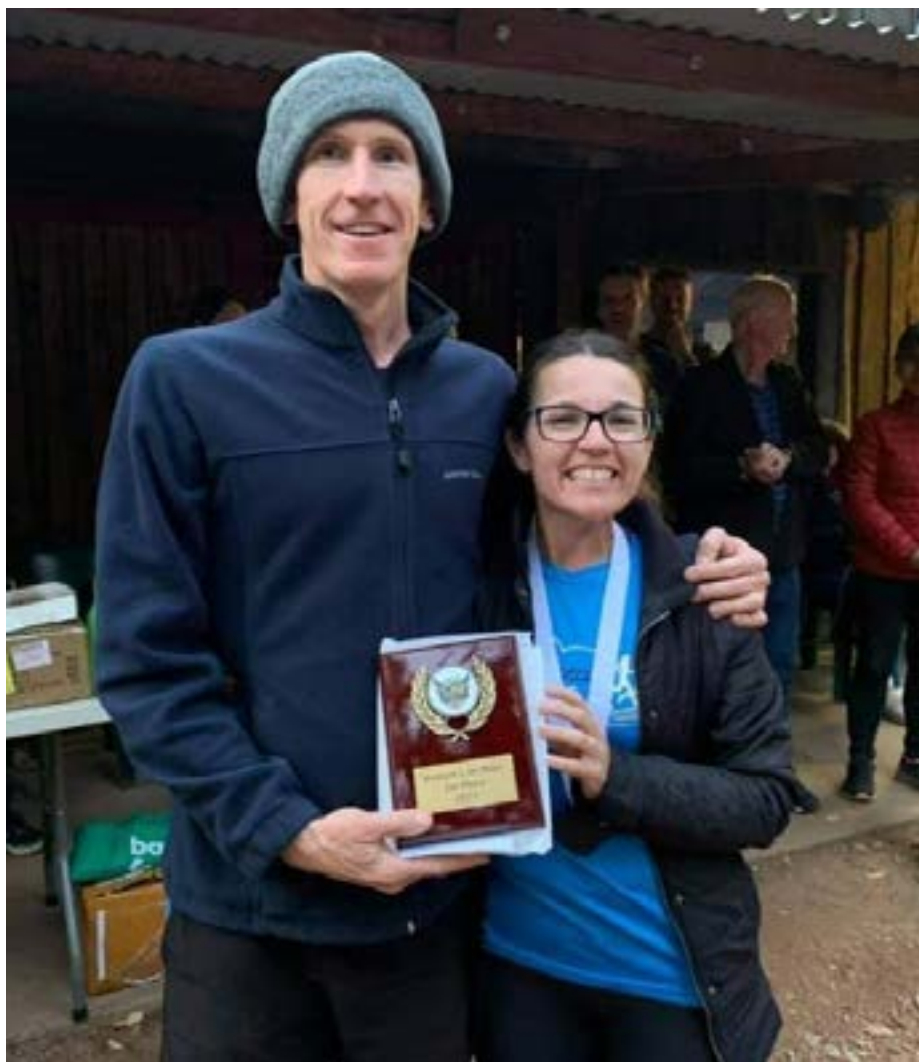


# WTF - 50 Miler 2021

mountain bikes riding at breakneck speed. In 2020 and 2021, my friends and I trained every weekend out there, to try to mitigate the possibility of getting lost. It paid dividends come race day as many athletes did get lost. With 10km down on this leg, we then enter the King Jarrah Loop. This loop feels like it is all uphill, with over 500m of elevation gain. And then of course, what goes up, must come down, and it seems to go down quite rapidly. On this loop there is the gorgeous, 500+ year old King Jarrah tree, which is enormous and humbling. After completing this loop, runners are then on the Munda Biddi flats, which after all that elevation gain is both a tad monotonous and boring as well as a welcomed reprieve. Then, we are back to knee-crunching, undulating, unforgiving bike paths. Lucky they are so pretty.

However, with 60km in the legs, it can be tricky to appreciate. Then the real work begins. I was pleased to see my crew at the Nanga Bush Base Camp, and refilled with Infinit and words of encouragement. I was feeling quite emotional by this point and was relieved to see my people and have my husband walk me out to the final section. This last stretch is 10.5km out-and-back across the Munda Biddi, Bridal and Bibbulmun trails. If the first leg was the hilly one and the second section was the long one, then Leg Three is the Finisher. Only 10.5km from home, it should be so sweet and easy. Well, it is very sweet and absolutely stunning with its windy, technical single trail and the gorgeous pine plantation. This final leg is where I found something I didn't know I had. That thing all trail runners are chasing. As Courtney Dauwalter explains, it's when you are digging trenches through your mind, to solve problems and keep on going. I loved this section, as I dedicated the 21km to a very dear friend of mine who had recently endured family medical issues. However, this final leg is rough. It is an out-and-back section, so you do get the opportunity to see other runners. In this race, it is easy to go several hours without seeing anyone, so I did enjoy seeing others.

I was blessed to share the course with six



other athletes who are part of the same coaching group; Mick Francis Coaching. I had the chance to give some of them a big hug and exchange words of encouragement as we went along that final stretch. Then it is a glorious, downhill run home. However, my legs were absolutely trashed and I was willing that finish line to come to me. As the downhill flattened out and we crossed the bridge towards the Nanga Bush Camp, my ever-present, supportive husband was waiting for me at the bottom to run that final uphill to the finish line. Why oh why, Dave Kennedy puts his aid stations and finish lines at the top of a hill, is a mystery. However, I chugged up that final hill, to the sweet sound of my friends and children cheering me home. I crossed that finish line at the campground with my children and called a big group hug from all of my people!

WTF is a game changer. It was my first win and my first 50-mile race.

Training throughout winter means training in the dark, cold and wet and I do not appreciate the cold and definitely not the rain. So the torrential rain of the 2020 race was a real challenge for me, but one I relish now. In 2021 the conditions were perfect and I had the great honour of sharing the podium with my coaching friends. In the 50-miler, we placed first and second male and female and second place in the 100-mile race.

Within days of finishing this wonderful event, my sweet ten-year old son was asking me when WTF is on again in 2022, as he wants to do it all over again. And like any good Mum and ultra-runner, I had to say, "Let's do that again!"

Checkout the two YouTube links; 2020 WTF, <https://youtu.be/83BK7oWW9lw> and WTF 2021, <https://youtu.be/GXMCMs6HylI>

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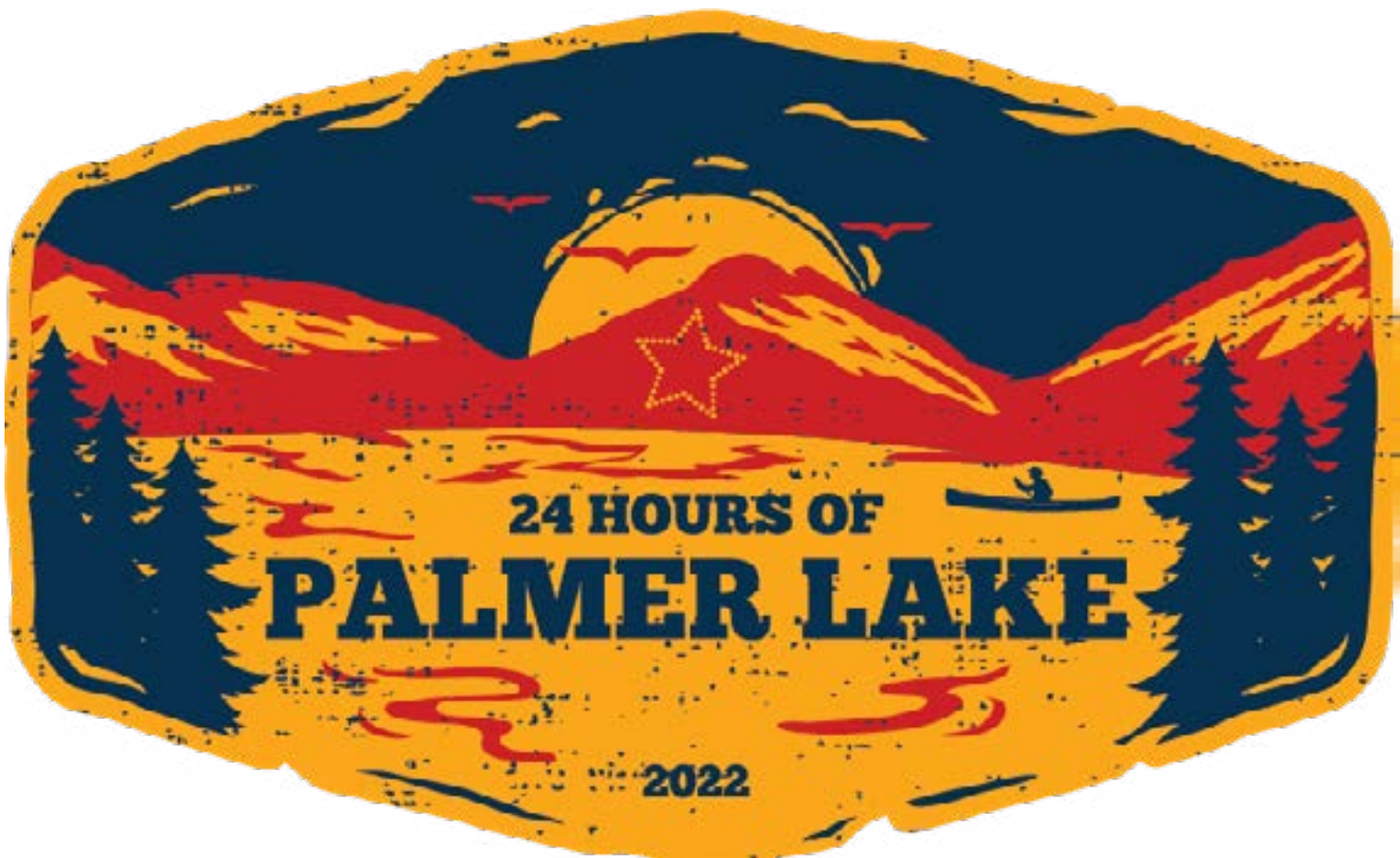
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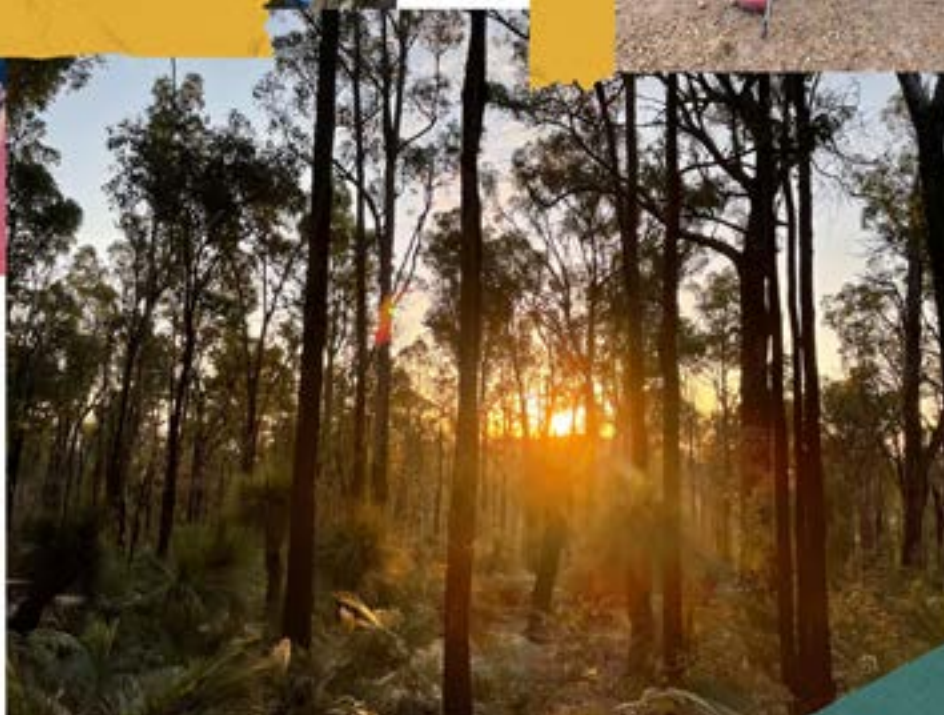


# WTF

*Written by Sam McCready*

## Event Details:

- **Date:** 25-Sep-2021
- **Location:** Nanga, Western Australia (90 km SE of Perth)
- **Distances:** 50 and a 100 miles
- **Format:** 3x leg course (run twice for the miler)
- **Elevation gain:** 4,800 m



*\*WTF is a rather eye-catching acronym for 'Waterous Trail on Foot' which is an MTB trail near the original course. It's also a small grass-roots ultra that attracts locals and internationals alike from the fast to the not so fast.*

The pre-race brief was just that – brief. And in what felt like an all too sudden jolt, Race Director (RD) David Kennedy sent 30 odd Fifty mile and nearly 20 One Hundred mile runners on our way for the 2021 WTF Ultramarathon. I was signed up to the 'miler' and was looking forward to a big day ahead.

Leg 1 (29 km) commenced at 6am from the START/FINISH at Nanga Bush Camp, nestled amidst the tall trees in a picturesque wilderness camp setting. The course crossed the narrow sealed Nanga Road before heading into the bush for 9 km along River Road, an undulating dirt track, to Aid Station 1 at Scarp Pool. The Fifty and Hundred 'milers' settled into their individual routines and quickly spread out. I enjoyed this section settling into a steady rhythm with lovely views down to the Murray River and up the other side of the forested valley. My nutrition/hydration regime included fuel every 45 minutes and 'drink-to-thirst'.

At Aid Station 1, I 'checked in' before heading off up a steep track for a

30 minute climb up to a clearing and then followed power transmission lines with some steep declines and inclines. The course turned hard right down a side stream before dropping steeply back down into the valley. After several stream crossings a narrow single track headed back to close the loop popping out just above the aid station on the ascent track. I checked in again and repeated the 5.5km loop for the second time before returning along River Road to START/FINISH [29km, 4:26].

The warm spring day made for pleasant running on the West Aussie orange dirt trails surrounded by green vegetation and brilliant blue sky. It was great to see my crew and grab some gels, electrolyte tabs and check on time and splits. Everyone was in a jovial mood, including me and it was great to get that leg out of the way although it had taken the shine off my legs.

Leg 2 (33km) left the START/FINISH and made a hard left out of the camp and followed a forestry road before veering right off the road and onto the Munda Biddi MTB track. I stopped and had a quick chat with my fellow Kiwi friend Raquel (a hard core ultrarunner herself), who was a volunteer directing runners to the correct track. This section was 7.5 km through undulating forest trails and passed a zig-zag ascending section of track before winding around a hill and a sharp left down to a bridge and up the other side to Aid Station 2 at Nanga Brook.



From here the trail exited the Aid Station and commenced an 18 km anti-clockwise loop called the King Jarrah Trail. The trail sidled around a slope for 500 m before turning straight up the hill. At the top, it appeared to be a bush plateau and the track wound through sparse trees and dropped into and climbed out of two streams. After the second one, the track started a descent down off the plateau and passed an impressive Jarrah tree (the King). The track popped out onto the Munda Biddi MTB track which was a relatively flat and a wide dirt track back to Aid Station 2. It was great to see my crew for a quick chat and stock up on supplies before heading back along the track, passed the zig-zags, and on to the START/FINISH [62km, 10:03]. It's always a real boost rocking into an aid station to claps and cheers of other crews and volunteers alike.

Leg 3 (22km) exited the camp in a northerly direction and followed the sealed Nanga Road across a Bridge over the Murray River before rejoining the MTB track further up the hill. Several more road crossings separated by a hill crest and it was down into a dark stand of pine which I nicknamed the 'Enchanted Forest'. The track dropped down to the valley floor only to ascend up the other side. Three quarters up the slope the trail exited the pine forest over a dirt road and entered a bush track and wound through to a crest then down to another forestry road at the all-important turn around. I grabbed a selfie 'proof-of-life' photo before retracing my steps.

The field was well and truly spread out and I spent most of the time on my own. As this leg was an out-and-back without any loops, I saw a few more runners both on the way out and on the return back to the START/FINISH and the halfway mark [84km, 14:07].

With the help of my support crew, I grabbed gels and muesli bars and filled my water bottles, added electrolyte tabs and loaded everything in my ultra-vest including the main head torch and back up.

I headed out into the darkness to start the course all over again for the second half. There were

a few runners coming back the other way in singles and pairs with head torches lighting the way. I made steady time to Aid Station 1 and checked in, grabbed some gels and headed up the steep climb. I was well and truly weary at this stage even though I was only 93 km in.

The ascent in the dark dragged a bit but before I knew it, I was at the top and on my way down through the tricky tight bush tracks and stream crossings. Hitting the Aid station, I checked in before heading back out for the final mountain loop. Returning to the aid station, I was greeted by RD David Kennedy and WTF veteran Ben Treasure, who were packing up. It was a real boost to see these top fellas and have a quick chat. I set out on the final return along River Road. A few minutes later the lad's 4WD came out of the darkness from behind and disappeared out into the void ahead on the trail to START/FINISH [113km, 20:56].

On arrival, the 'pit crew' helped me fuel up and top up water bottles. My feet were feeling pretty damp and had not dried from the night-time river crossings, so I elected to do a quick sock change. Foot triage is an absolute must and a critical part of the decision making and problem-solving tool kit. I downed some hot soup that tasted bloody awesome.

Setting off for the second time onto Leg 2, I immediately felt the confidence boost of being done with Leg 1, now I was well and truly getting into the business end of the race. I was trucking along at a steady pace with a 10 min run-5 min walk routine. In no time I happened upon the zig-zag track and pushed on to Aid Station 2.

I was greeted by a smaller splinter support crew. A welcome boost with flagging energy levels and rising muscle soreness. Marching out of the Aid Station I did a few quick checks of gear. My main head torch was working well and I swapped between floodlight and spotlight to confirm trail markers. Where the trails aren't that clearly defined, it is easy to deviate off track and even easier at night, heavy with fatigue and 120 km in. My coach Kerry Suter always says "concentrate". Steady going along the top of the plateau and I noticed the light starting to increase as dawn approached. Down the back end of the plateau, I stopped to grab a quick sunrise photo through the trees before continuing on to the MTB track.

From here I made really good time and arrived at 8am after some 26 hours on the go and 138 km. The crew had been watching my InReach GPS tracks and when they realised I had sped up they had a mad dash to get ready, out the door of the cottage and drive down to the Aid Station.

The cruise through the forest was uneventful and the cool, clear morning air and midmorning blue sky made for an enjoyable tab back to the START/FINISH by 9:30 am Sunday [146km, 27:29].

I breezed into camp without much laughing and joking, grabbed



## Race Report

fuel, topped up fluid and rocked on out within three minutes, the quickest transition yet. I remember RD David Kennedy saying that I better hurry if I wanted to get back by noon for the prize-giving!

Out onto Leg 3 for the last time, I was well and truly in the hurt locker; that aside there was no way I was not going to finish. Heading up the hill I passed several of the 50 mile runners on the way to their finish including Shirley Treasure accompanied by good Ol' Ben Treasure. We exchanged greetings and well wishes.

It was a real grind up the hill, back into the enchanted forest and out to the return point, 11 km to go. I was moving slowly but maintaining a steady clip.

A 100 miler is such a long way and anything can happen. In this final section I had my first ever hallucination. I jumped when I saw the shark. Then I looked closer and the light grey body was actually a fallen sun-bleached tree trunk and the teeth were actually numerous sharp splinters or shards arcing out in an array from the remaining trunk/roots in the ground to the fallen body of the tree. A short distance along the trail I was shocked to see a bear but on closer inspection it was a burnt-out tree stump.

I kept my forward momentum, dog tired and eventually made it over the road crossings and down the hill side to the bridge. Turning into the bush camp driveway I had a few electric pangs of emotion as I realised I was as good as done. I jogged it home and crossed the line 32:11 after travelling 168 km on foot with nearly 4,800 metres of vertical.

I was the 'ultimate' runner (sounds better than last!). It was awesome to cross the finish line of my second 'miler' to the cheers of my rather loud support crew, volunteers and RD Dave Kennedy. DK did the honours and put the finishers medal around my neck and also gave me a commemorative belt buckle usually reserved for sub-24 hour finishers of which there were none in 2021.

Sitting down in a camp chair eating a meat pie and drinking a cold beer with the WTF-ultra finishers medal around my neck was just the best feeling.

### Acknowledgements:

A big thanks to the crew: The McCreadys, The Crossens and The Walkers. Thanks to Squadrun coaches Kerry and Ali; and my ultra-mentor, Ferg Hawke. Great to get messages along the way from mates PK and GP. Thanks to RD David Kennedy and his team of staff and volunteers for putting on a fantastic event.





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# DONADEA 50K

*Donadea Forest, Co. Kildare*

*Written by Andrew Meehan*

Early in the morning on 12 February 2022 Donadea Forest awoke to the whisper of car tyres coming to a halt on the newly laid tarmac in the car park, accompanied by the 'thunk' of car doors closing, a few hundred strides from the finish line of the 12th running of the National 50K Championship.

The race team involved in organising the 50K heard little of this, busy as they were getting the final bits and pieces ready for the almost 300 that were registered to take part in today's run.

For those who don't know the route it is just under 5km on a mixed surface of tarmac, compacted dirt and cinder with a good dose of forest leaves to soften the ground. With fiveish hills, three proper ones and two little ones with an overall elevation of about 25 meters every lap, according to my Garmin. No big climbs so how hard can it be?

The race starts on the flat with a wide avenue-style path but quickly narrows as you hit the first turn going around the lake. Old tarmac surface with bumps caused by the tree roots and then you are up the first incline towards the 911 memorial. Sharp left turn and onto the compacted dirt, another left and you are under the forest canopy proper now. The edges of the trail are ripped up with tractor tread marks and then you hit the first proper hill.

Up you go and down to the next, and then the next. That is the three hills done, through the crossroads and a nice bit of flat until the route wanders left and you go down the only real drop on the course. Wonderful as you run down, picking up speed onto the flat again, past the 3k marker and moving along the flat some more, through a second crossroad and there is the 4k marker. The route meanders right, left, right and then you see the water table where you turn hard left and onto the long straight towards the finish. A little of a drag here with a sudden increase in steepness about 50 meters from the finish line.

As runners and their crews wander down to the finishing area, some go to the tent to pick up the t-shirts, others go to the line of tables laid out to place their provisions. Everyone has a laugh at the various signs 'Don't be a dickhead', 'Do 10 laps and Fook off', 'Be under 5 hours', 'No littering!'

Race director, Anthony Lee, along with his team from Donadea Running Club, were getting tables out for the water stops, directing runners and their crews to where they can set up, making sure the portable toilets were open. Pop Up Races was setting up the finish line gantry and timing equipment. Marshals were





being sent to various places around the route to man corners and tables. I'll give a full list of those who were there at the end. I had an aim for today's race, the same aim as many other people, just to finish.

### It happened – just about!

With about 15 minutes to the start time of 10am I made my way to the starting area, down towards the back; no need to be up the front or the middle here, and tried to decide if I really needed the bathroom again.

As the nervous pacing and shuffling of feet amongst the racers began it was punctuated with questions like 'Do you think it will rain?' (it did but only briefly), 'Have you done this before?' 'Are you looking for a time?' We could see the pacers make their way to their assigned positions. We were nearly ready to begin.

I could hear some murmurs of voices up ahead, then a whistle and we were moving. Shuffling up to the start line, weaving to avoid all the puddles of water along the path, 'Beeeeeep' over the starting mat, the watch started, and we were running!

Carefully at this stage as the path is really only suitable for three or four people wide and it narrows, so you don't want to go over on

an ankle at this early stage.

As I passed the coffee shop I could see the front runners ahead, already around the second turn on the lake a few hundred meters on.

I have run this 50K several times in the past, finishing so wet from rain that it took two people to pull my running top off, and with hands so swollen from the cold that they wouldn't fit into my car door handle to open it.

I knew this day's race would be hard underfoot. In fact, it was the worst underfoot conditions that I've run in in the forest. We had an almost perfect storm of events in the previous week, lots of rain to soften the ground and works being done in the forest had torn up the edges of the paths; in some places the ruts were ankle deep in mud. That would only get worse as the day progressed.

I started with the 4:45 pacer towards the back of the group, a nice easy pace but three kilometres in and I was struggling a little bit, 'Not to worry, I said to myself, you are just warming up'. I'd pulled a muscle in my back, that morning getting out of the car, and was a little concerned about it and I was carrying a long-term back injury already. The massage team, lead by Brendan Down

of Kildare Sports Massage, had done a great job of working on me in the time before the race. I kept moving on to lap two where, already, the large crowd down the back of the field had thinned out a little. I wanted to get onto lap three before I got passed by the front runners, as I knew that today I was going to be lapped three times by them. No whistle as I came up the finishing straight on lap two, where the grass verge in the middle was already almost turned to mud. Head down to watch the potholes, a quick wave of the hand and a flash of a smile, to all the spectators. Through the finish line gantry and onto lap three.

(A few days later my wife confessed to me that she had never seen me look as bad in a race and wasn't sure that I'd even make the third lap. I was grateful that I couldn't see my face while running).

The plan was to grab a bottle and a filled donut on lap three and so it happened. I had increased the pace a little as I knew that I'd be slowing towards the end and wanted to have a little time in the bag. Joined up with some folks and had a bit of a chat as we went, the energy levels were good and it's nice to talk.

Less than halfway around lap





three and the whistle was heard indicating that the front runners were coming up. They zoomed past at a pace that was incredible, they got some shouts of encouragement from the various groups and were off in the distance.

Laps four and five went without issue. Large gaps of running on your own now and on lap five you could see people beginning to struggle. Not so much with the cold, it was a lovely temperature but the hills (the three sisters as I call them, until lap eight where they become the three bi\*\*hes), and the now slippery surface of mud was taking its toll on the energy levels. Gasps of 'hi' or grunts were beginning to become the norm instead of the conversations of early on.

I'd been eating well and drinking well, a mix of water and electrolytes, but was getting increasingly hotter. Even with the cool temperature and the light rain that was falling my glasses were steamed up – I was working too hard, but it was too early in the distance to start walking. Walk-run was the plan from lap eight onwards as I knew that my back was going to go.

Passed for the last time by the front runners somewhere around the middle of lap seven, things were not going to plan for me. I couldn't cool down; my glasses were in my pocket because they kept steaming up and I couldn't see so I had my

head down trying to look at the ground to ensure that I didn't fall. Ignore the back for a little longer. Keep moving.

I was through the finish area again, walking as I had another donut and a drink. From the corner of my eye, I see that some runners have finished, the delight on their faces. I could also see folks whose race was done for this year, the disappointment and pain on their faces, with their supporters not able to say anything to console them. I knew what that was like and my heart went out to them.

I kept going, around the lake, up to the 911 memorial and left onto the first of the three hills and then I didn't know what lap I was on. Had I done seven or eight? Did I have two or three more to do? Coming up the finishing straight again, the time on the watch was right, almost four hours of running but the distance indicated that I'd another 16 kilometres to go.

A few moments of panic, if both time and distance were right, I'd never finish under the five hours. I frantically scanned the crowd for a face from the club. "My watch is off, check my laps, check my laps," I screamed at my wife. Followed by "Where is Lisa? Get her up here now." I'd organised a club mate to run the last few laps with me in case I needed it.

I knew that I needed a distraction now, someone fresh to be able to talk to me and get my mind off the discomfort because otherwise you dwell on the pain and the distance left. You begin to wonder why isn't a marathon enough for you? You've nothing to prove to yourself you think, but you do. You signed up for this because you wanted to do more so you'd better stop feeling sorry for yourself and finish the job.

Lisa, my club mate, finds me and gives the news, a lap and a half to go, let's move on. And so, I do, the stopping and walking is more frequent now, breathing is ragged, I'm massively hot and the energy levels are getting low too. I try to cool myself by pouring water on my head, by the time it hits my back I hardly feel it as it is at body temperature. Keep moving.

Lap nine is done, 37 minutes left on the clock, at 11 minutes per mile average you can make it back. It's very busy in the finish area now, lots of folks have completed, runners walking gingerly around the place.

On we go, run for a bit, stop and walk, keeping moving forward.

'What time is left; what distance is left?' Another kilometre sign passed, another time check. Walk this bit of the hill, run this bit.

Under a kilometre to go now and I hear behind what I've been dreading, what I knew was coming, big Joe can see me, 'I can see you Andrew' he shouts. Joe Dunne is running as the 5-hour sweeper. Time check, distance check, right turn, left corner, left turn onto the last straight. I know that I can finish now with a little time left, I could nearly walk it but the slightly panicked look on Lisa's face made me pick it up a bit.

You can see the crowd now and the music is loud, you lift your head because it's the last time you need to go up that incline to cross the finish line and the camera is there so you might as well get your picture taken with a smile. I try to pick out my wife's face in the crowd, it's always a nice touch to get my medal from her.

I crossed the line, the clock read 4:58:30, 90 seconds left. High five from Anto and then helped onto a seat by my wife, Lorraine, because I really needed to sit. She has seen me do these enough times to know to give me a minute, I get a quick hug, and then she is off, busy giving out medals and helping other runners up and onto seats.

I held my medal in the palm of my hand and gripped the edges of the rectangular medal, so that it hurt, just a little, and thought to myself, "Job done, beat the forest, beat the time, be happy with that, another one done".

I congratulate the runners around me and have a little smile and a laugh as the RD chases after the last person over the line at the 5-hour mark to give him his DFL trophy. I want to thank Lisa but she is nowhere to be found.

I make myself stand up and look down at my runners (trainers, sneakers) for the first time since starting the race. How is

there so much mud on them? They were orange a while ago but are now the colour of the forest floor. They are never going to get clean again, I think.

I slowly wander over to the kit tent. I wanted to get some dry clothes on and put my legs up as I waited my turn for a rub down. I was going to be here for a few more hours anyway as I'd be helping to clear up after the race was over.

I find out that all of my clubmates have finished the race today. I am delighted for everyone, all the hard work paid off for them. I feel okay now, satisfied that I did what I set out to do, wondering over the fact that in all the runs in the forest the conditions are never the same, the forest always finds a way to take it out of you. I listen through the wall of the tent as people pass, talking about their experience today. Laughing at the way the RD talks to everyone, the joy of finishing their first, or multiple 50K and the disappointment of others at not finishing today.

For those who didn't make it today, come back next February. This 50K forest run is a special event run in a way that you don't get in other races. From the route, the collection of pacers, the crowd supporting you, the race team from Donadea Running Club and the RD, you will not find this experience anywhere else.

For those who persevered after the clock went dead, determined to cover the distance, you are a wonderful example of what a runner is. Come back and beat the clock. For those who didn't finish, come back, finish and put your medal in pride of place in your collection.

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	Event	Location	Miles	S/M/L
Sat 5 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Pendle Way in a Day	Pennines	45	M
Sat 12 <sup>th</sup> March	Haworth Hobble	South Pennines	32	S
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup> April	Calderdale Hike	South Pennines	36	M
Sat 30 <sup>th</sup> April	The Fellsman	Yorkshire Dales	61	L
Sat 14 <sup>th</sup> May	Spire Ultra	Derbyshire	34	S
Sat 25 <sup>th</sup> June	Lakeland 5 Passes	Lake District	32	S
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup> July	Hallow 12 Parishes	Worcestershire	40	M
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup> July	Pennine 39	North Pennines	39	M
Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup> September	Bullock Smithy Hike	Peak District	56	L
Sun 27 <sup>th</sup> September	Lancashireman	Pennines	27	S
Sat 1 <sup>st</sup> October	Round Rotherham	South Yorkshire	50	L
Sat 22 <sup>nd</sup> October	Yorkshire Trod	Yorkshire Dales	62	L

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Written by Sarah Meegan

# DONADEA 50KM IRISH NATIONAL 50K CHAMPIONSHIP

Donadea 50km is one of the most well-known 50km races in Ireland not least because it is the National 50k Championship. Due to this there are elite Irish runners who complete the race in sub-3 hour times and others who strive to complete it within the imposed 5 hour cut-off time, the clock is literally turned off at 4:59:59!

The course record was set in 2019 by Gary O'Hanlon in 2:50:48. The race organisers were very clear from the outset that the clock would be turned off at 5 hours so all runners were aware of this and had no complaints. Even though the clock was turned off, many still continued the race and successfully completed the distance. The race itself is incredibly well organised thanks to Anthony Lee who oversees all aspects related to it. The atmosphere at Donadea 50km is amazing and the support along the route really helps spur runners on. I was fortunate as my brother also ran the race with me, so having company along the way certainly made the miles pass by quicker. The route is 10 laps of 5k around a beautiful forest trail, and apart from a slight hill along the route it's a fairly flat course. The hill of course felt a bit like climbing a mountain by lap 10! There was a lot of rain in the 24 hours before the race so there were some parts of the route that were wet and heavy underfoot, but most of the terrain was steady and solid.

For my own part, having run several marathons I wanted a new challenge so this was my first attempt at the 50km distance. I would recommend all keen long-distance runners to try to run 50km, it was a hugely positive experience. The training wasn't too dissimilar to marathon training except the distance of the long runs; I ran 26 miles as my longest

distance where I'd usually max out at 23 miles for a marathon, what's another three miles you might say! I only managed to run four days a week as I have three young children, but I got around the distance relatively comfortably, finishing in 4:26. The biggest challenge for me running this distance was fuelling. I have always struggled with fuelling correctly, I don't tolerate gels well and eating solid food gives me cramps so there was a lot of trial and error before race day. I think I found the fuelling solution that works for me and that is not to take a full or even half a gel at a time, I fuelled intermittently where I took a mouthful at a time and consumed one gel every 10km. It wasn't a lot of fuel intake given the distance but I had no issues and ran in comfort which was the most important thing. The race for me was a very personal experience as my youngest brother and fiancé tragically lost their baby daughter in December 2021. I was three months into training for the race when this happened and afterwards I pretty much gave up running for a period, I had lost all motivation. It's mentally very difficult to run long distances in training when something like that happens. Some time afterwards I had the idea to run Donadea 50km as a remembrance run to raise money for an amazing charity called Féileacáin (meaning butterfly in Irish) who supports grieving parents who have lost babies. This gave me the motivation I needed to get back training and I did so with renewed gusto knowing I was doing the race for charity. In the end over €14,600 was raised which I never expected.

Looking back on the experience of training for and running Donadea 50km, I would say to any runner who has already run up to marathon distance and is looking for a new challenge, consider running a 50km race as the next step in your running journey. To any Irish runner who is tempted or anyone considering travelling to Ireland for a good 50km race, Donadea is the one for you!





# ART O'NEIL ULTRA

Written by Pietro Andrianopoli

*I signed up to this ultra with two friends from Project Awesome, a free fitness group that hosts workouts in the city at 6:30am. Tom is a fast runner, aiming to achieve a sub-three hour marathon, and is not too far from that. Chris is an experienced runner, having already done a few ultras. For me, it was my first and I had only run one marathon before that, although I have experience in hiking and mountaineering, including two OMMs.*



The idea of running 60km, leaving Dublin at night and orienteering in the Wicklow mountains was scary but we thought our group could make it. We were joined at the start line by Eva, runner and triathlete, and Martina, who ran the first part with us. The race starts from the courtyard of Dublin castle, with a really well-organised set-up allowing us to drop our bags, check our kit, get our race numbers and race bags and have a GPS transponder fixed on our rucksacks. I was impressed by the organisation and warmth of the marshals and volunteers. For Covid reasons, the start was staggered so that at 21:10, there was just our little group leaving the starting area, while others were still in preparation.

The organisers informed us that the race this year was 60km long. The first 30km was on tarmac road and the second 30km was the hilly part of the trail.

From the castle, we left an empty but still magical Dublin. Covid rules were forcing pubs to close at 8pm so we were almost alone using the footpath. At the junction with R114, we met a group of walkers who had started before us and then we were in the dark with our head torches guiding us in the Dublin outskirts.

After a flat 10km the road became hilly but nothing too dramatic and it can be easily

run.

We decided to keep a comfortable 6min/km pace. At the 15th kilometre, there was the first checkpoint with water, jellies and two friendly volunteers. Just before that we had seen a few participants taking a wrong turn. This stamped in our mind that we would need to be careful, although the first part didn't require a compass or map.

After the first checkpoint, the road started

hot food (tasty soup and sausage rolls) and as usual, a lot of volunteers cheering us on! From there, other volunteers pick up your kit bag and take it to the end. From this point, you

must have the compulsory kit for the second part of the race (compass, map, additional layer). I would suggest having this already prepared in a bag within the kit bag to make everything easier and faster.

I also changed my footwear, choosing a pair of trail shoes while others went for hiking boots. I consider a good treaded-sole trail shoe as enough for the second part. We used a nice path within the wood and then started the uphill part in the bog. Despite being a bog, you

could "see" a vague path through. After a few kilometres, the orienteering part started. The path in the bog disappeared and we could see other participants taking different routes, mainly east and south. We decided to keep a south-southeast path up to the ridge, east of Billy Byrne's gap.

While on the ridge, the fog came and it was impossible to find the route by sight. It became necessary to orienteer using only the compass or GPS. Our pre-planned route was to cut south-southeast, crossing Ballinagh River and using a fire path towards the second checkpoint.

This was probably the most technical part. The visibility was below 50 metres, the boggy terrain and holes obliging us to move left and right to go through. We realised that our route was S-shaped,

which meant that the GPS was not reliable enough to navigate efficiently so we had to switch to compass-only navigation, keeping a bearing towards south-southeast.

It was amazing to see the head torch lights of other participants, everyone using a different route or bearing, although most of them were keeping a route similar to ours. Around 3am, we reached Banaagher where a path comfortably brought us to CP2. This checkpoint was food only, no bag service. We spent a bit longer than expected to warm up at the fire pit.

Then we started the last part at 4am, towards Art's Cross and then the finish line. We decided to cross the Ashbawn Brook and go up on the right hand side of the ridge. It was a steep ascent in a stable but very wet terrain, although we had to cross rivers and brooks at least five times. We arrived at the top and realised that we were within 100 metres of the cross and actually at the same altitude. However it was very foggy so after ten minutes we decided not to search for the cross. The rules stated that a distance within 300 metres was acceptable.

From there, we headed south to Glenmalure. The first part was still a bit difficult as we had to jump up and down small holes and dry creeks. Daytime arrived and the fog rose a bit, making the way easier. We then reached the river and the path (take care, you have to turn left three times from the main path) and found ourselves at the pre-Covid finish line. We rested a few minutes and then pushed on for the last four kilometres to cross the new finish line.

On arrival, the amazing crew was waiting with hot grilled food and our bags. We made use of the changing area and after a few minutes were sitting on the pub benches enjoying the pale wintery sun!

Summarising: If you have mountain orienteering skills or a friend who is able to navigate at night, it is really worth doing the Art O'Neill challenge. The night is long and the route technical. The weather can also be inclement so prepare well as the weather conditions are very different from the ones in the city when starting the race!



swapped my base layer for a thermal one. This turned out to be a great choice. Few participants added more layers but I felt comfortable with two plus a rain jacket and no insulated jacket. At CP1, there was also a nice fire,

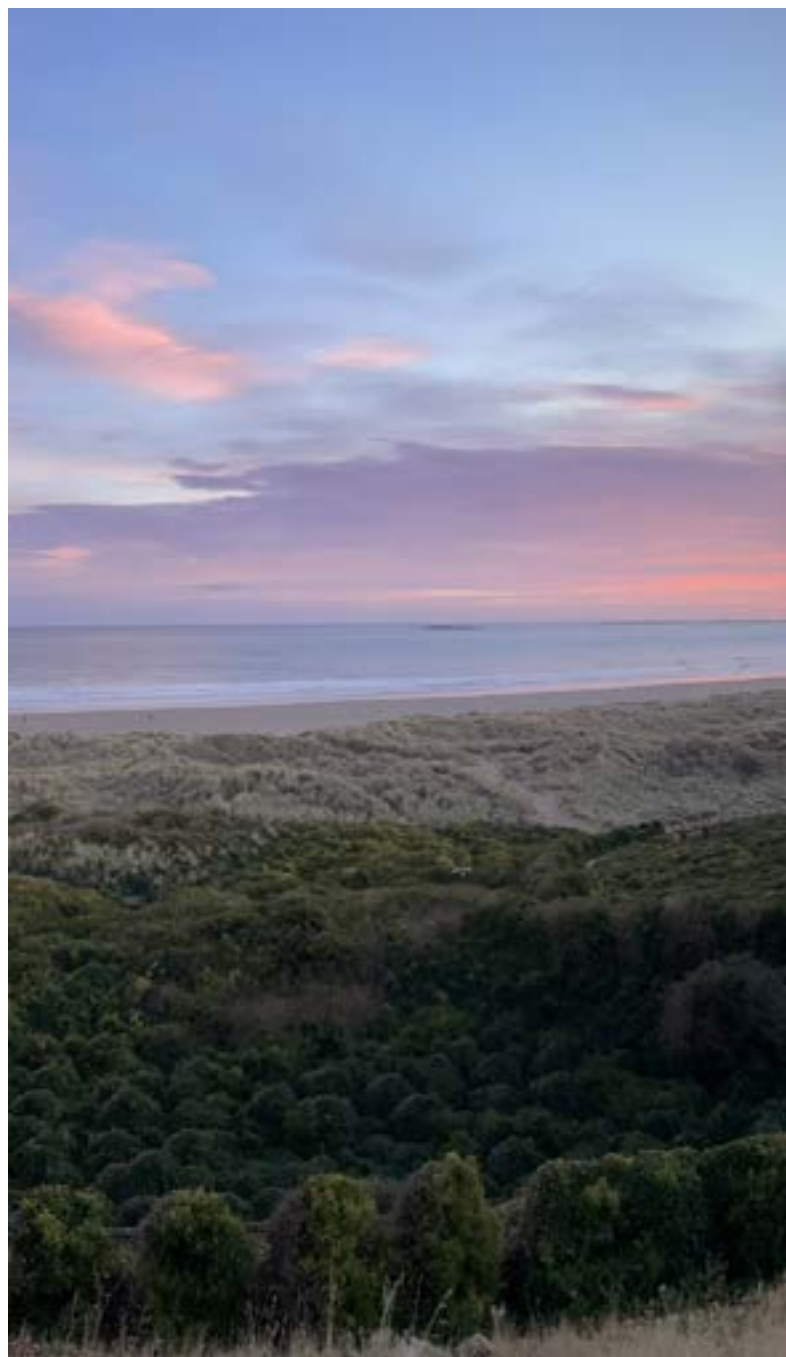
# ENDURANCELIFE

## NORTHUMBERLAND ULTRA 2022

*Written by Chris Evans*

I had been dreading this one for a while - 36 miles mostly heading directly north along the Northumberland coastline in late February has the potential for one tough day out; if the wind is from the north then it could be near constant headwinds of icy arctic blast with wind, sleet and even a hint of sandblasting. This was my first ultra as an actual event, having completed a solo project in Summer '21 when events were still rare. A recent convert to running having completely lost all fitness and motivation throughout my 20's, I only stumbled into it through joining Edinburgh's EH3-Milers one Wednesday evening a few years back as something to do and finding running can actually be fun with the right people. However, the realisation my runs mainly revolved around beer, food or the forecast of the week in the run up to this was hitting hard.

The training had been sporadic at best with very limited long runs since the Dramathon "marathon" in October, colds and flus, chest infections and the winter blues all playing their part. One month out I did summon the motivation to check what I was still capable of, joining the regular sunday 10km run and brunch around north Edinburgh then fueled by hot filled rolls and coffee heading south across the city and up into the Pentlands for another 32km of head clearance, keeping pace in check and fueling well throughout, things felt good, a little too good and I





pushed too hard in the late downhill stages leaving me with quad issues, taking it easy in the coming weeks to prepare for Northumberland.

Race weekend came and all the fears and doubts were unfounded - hitting the road south from Edinburgh at 5:30 - it was a beautiful morning with the sunrise filling the sky with pink and red giving me the energy burst needed, arriving in plenty of time to enjoy the moment overlooking the finish line at Bamburgh Castle. The sun was up, no rain in sight, gentle winds from the south and unseasonably warm for a late February day. We were in for a good day.

The event was excellently organised by Endurancelife with easy parking, toilets and coaches all perfectly organised and taking the stress away. I caught up with Christine, who I'd be running the start with, and the confidence levels were not all that high, just looking to have a good day out and enjoy it. The marathon and ultra routes both shared the same start line and time with the ultra just adding a loop on at the end so we deliberately held right back at the start to avoid being swept along with the marathon runners heading for good times, but there were a few pinch points on the route in the early stages, swing gates, tight muddy sections and fences with stiles to get over so it was a stop-start beginning to the race rather than the steady miles we wanted to get going with. The route followed the river Aln down from overlooking Alnwick Castle through the river trails, farmland and forests to Alnmouth where it joined the English coastal path north towards Bamburgh.

Arriving at the first checkpoint on the coast around Boulmer everything was going well I thought, the jacket was off and still plenty of water in the flasks, so just an end of a banana, on back up the hill from the coastline to the cliff path. Looking back it is pretty clear I did not drink enough in these early stages

and would be fighting an uphill battle with dehydration and cramps later on in the race. The route continues along the path past Longhoughton beach, and Cullernose points to the second stop around 21km. The pace was still good at this point but I could feel the first blisters in over two years coming on so I took a full stop to tape up the issues and already at 10:30 it was time for shorts and t-shirt to feel the winter sun on the skin. At this point I started to see the first of many DNFs throughout the day and realised I was actually in a pretty good state overall.

Coming out from checkpoint two at Craster, the field was now well spread out and I was running solo having dropped off with the footcare time - it was approaching lunchtime and I have distinct memories of running through a pub beer garden with a seafood truck just getting fired up for the day ahead but no time to stop. The hill coming out of Craster proved troublesome but some serious encouragement and drive from another runner pulled me through - he held a good consistent pace in the rest of this section past the magnificent Dunstanburgh Castle and onwards to checkpoint three with the issues a distant memory. Just after Dunstanburgh I was reminded of the pitfalls of UK coastal trail running as a golf ball came from the skies landing less than a metre from me. The coastal path was busy with other walkers as well so a close call and a bit of fire in the belly to push on from here.

The short sandy beach sections continued from here, with so little sand/beach training this was a concern, but at low tide the sand was fairly hard packed and runnable. Worries about sand exacerbating the earlier foot issues also proved unfounded and the miles ticked away to the next checkpoint after Seahouses.

Heading onwards from Seahouses the route hit the longest beach section at around 5km in total along towards Bamburgh Castle and the marathon finish point. Having only run over 42km once, the temptation to pick up the pace thinking my finish line was coming was there and proved an unstoppable urge. The earlier hydration ama-



## Race Report

tourism caught up with me over this section however, running out of water 4km from there and early signs of cramp starting to kick in. Reaching a rocky section I had another reminder of what I was putting myself through, seeing some very elite-looking runners struggling to walk up to the climb over the rocks and fighting for every step. I had to reign it in and finish this.

There was one final checkpoint before the marathoners split off for their finish line. It seemed like everyone around me was nearly at the end of their day with spirits running high and me just keeping quiet about the additional 15km loop I still had to go on top. Rounding the final curve of the beach, we got the first view of Bamburgh Castle of the race up close. The final climb off the beach on the soft dunes with tired legs was awful - straight after this climb it was the route-divergence point and all the temptation of just taking the left and the marathon, but the marshal at this point was exactly what was needed, she'd seen it all before and gave a few strong but warm words to send you off on the right path.

The ensuing loop proved to be as tough as expected - the initial coastal path section through the beachgrass was stunning and taking a moment to look back at Bamburgh across the dunes I was happy with the call to con-



of anything other than walking this last hill. Across the other side and the long descent began with some easy miles, and considering we were now into the headwind this did not seem to factor too much, the group spread out and I was feeling fairly strong again after the last stop. This final section flew by as we came down on to the beach for another short section of sand before a second hit at that same soft sand dune hill to where we had previously gone right for the additional loop, turning left this time. The assumption was it would just be 100-200m but this section was longer than expected. There were quite a few walking wounded limping towards the finish line to be passed and despite the cramp hitting every 20 steps or so I was feeling good and picked up the pace a little right up until 100m from the end, it was right there. Content it wouldn't make any difference to the time overall whether I walked or ran from this point I just continued to limp towards the finish until fellow runner Vinod caught up - he wouldn't have me finish like this, insisting I

tinue on the full ultra route. It wasn't far past this point that once again the flasks ran dry and cramp set in. A small group had formed, all pushing through the difficulties and helping each other along and this pushed me on to the final checkpoint and a feeling that it was all in sight now. This was of course the happiest and friendliest stop of the day, the warmest of North East welcomes, a glass of coke was forced upon anyone who passed along with the necessary salty crisps and refill of the water - massive shout out as well to these two heroes of the day.

Leaving this final stop was a long sustained hill. I'm in no doubt that on fresher legs this could be conquered without much complaint, but on the tired legs and a bit of a conservative mindset none of us had even a thought





ran the final few metres with him and finish in style.

The whole day was brilliantly organised and compared to running my own routes with limited re-supply options it was significantly more enjoyable - the coastline around Northumberland is stunningly beautiful, especially on a day such as this and Endurancelife did an excellent job. Bamburgh itself also proved an awesome setting with the great views and lovely warm pubs for the post-run pints. This event was a precursor to heading to the Lake District for THE LAP which goes around Lake Windermere over 72km in mid-May and feeling pretty confident for now with a further 12 weeks to go. In the meantime, it's back to planning runs around beer, food and sunny days.

<https://www.endurancelife.com/>





*Written by Francesca Goodwin*



Bleary eyed in the stark light of the 'morning after' a stormy December night on the Norfolk coastline, I thought for a moment that my brain had finally given in to sleep deprivation: there, at my elbow, a determined steeliness in her eyes, teeth ripping open an energy gel, was the second place lady.

I was wrong. I wasn't hallucinating. We were about four miles from the finish and this was definitely happening. She was still very much there, still very much running, still very much racing.

Oh.

I had lined up at the start of Darkside Running's 'Sunrise Ultramarathon' the previous afternoon with no expectations other than to maybe make it to the halfway mark and see some seals. I hadn't trained since September due to persistent injuries, was exhausted from a long term of teaching and, to cap it off, had rolled my ankle on a dark trail run and then ruptured a capillary in my throat, thanks to a vomiting bug, the week before. As I knocked back some more antibiotics on the bus to Hunstanton, to say things weren't looking peachy was an understatement – yet here I was. Indeed, fate had other plans for me that day, and I led the ladies' race from the off. At the moment that the elbow tap came, however, my ankles and calves were not feeling happy at my decision to drag them over 84 miles of scree beaches and deep mud, and I was plodding along, munching on some peanut butter cookies, enjoying the sunshine and hoping that I could just walk home a win without doing permanent damage.

And I could have done that. We could have literally tumbled over the finish line together. But something in my tired brain connected with my legs and they started to move. Fast. Suddenly, I was sprinting over the sand dunes (I say sprinting very loosely because an 8min/mile hobble feels like you're Usain Bolt after 20 hours on your feet). "Let's do this!" became: "Let's race!".

What was it that made me dig into those reserves that I hadn't known existed? On reflection, underneath the literal knee-jerk reaction and the urge to win, was also the thought that we owed it to ourselves, to each other, to finish properly. Underneath was the awe that we, the two leading women, had run an incredibly long way in incredibly tough

conditions. We were strong and we should complete it in the way that any man would: pushing ourselves right to the end. And we did. It was, ultimately, her grit and resilience to keep chasing that fired up my quads and pushed me to break the course record by far more than I would have done had I continued toddling along the beach, serenading myself with everything from Disney songs to half-remembered school hymns and making an admirable dent in my cookie stash.

She believed me to be worthy competition and so I felt worthy: I ran.

Women are so used to that voice in their head that whispers: "No; you can't." Maybe they're not strong enough; after all, men are the strong ones – right? Maybe they have children, jobs, or partners who they can't leave; after all, what will happen to the home if they 'abandon' it. Between dinner and the school run, they don't have time to train. They feel guilty, they feel judged: "Goodness you run a lot; don't you miss spending time with your family?!"

Then there's the fear: the catcalling on the pavements, the startling toots and shouts out of windows, the slight jump in heart rate as dark descends on a backstreet in winter. The fear becomes avoidance; the avoidance sees the freedom that running once promised, dwindle: "Text me when you're home". Is it any wonder that, surrounded by this messaging, the whisper grows and grows until it shouts: "You're just not good enough!"

Until you've walked in a woman's shoes, this will feel somewhat alien – particularly in a world where we are told that we are equal. Yet, as women, we are still carrying an awareness of what could happen to us, we are still carrying that sense of vulnerability, that we could be a target. With the comparative lack of female representation in the public face of adventure and endurance sports, there is little to challenge that perception. Yes, things are changing, but, until women don't feel like they need an excuse to take on these challenges, the narrative of 'just not good enough' will prevail.

Ironically, if you look at the stats, whilst women don't necessarily outperform men in endurance sports, ultra-endurance events are much more closely contested. The longer the distance, the less of a gap between men and women. Yes, women may not be as physically strong as men and their aerobic capacity

may be lower, but try rolling around in pain every month clutching a hot water bottle, try bleeding on public transport wearing light trousers, try giving birth, try crying uncontrollably in the supermarket and not caring, try being told you're too much, too little, too fat, too thin, again and again and again...

The thing is that women know how to dig down, grit their teeth and hold on for the journey, not the prize. And, ultimately, that's what you need to succeed in ultras because the finish is a long way off (and then some).

Often, I feel like I have something to prove as a woman in a male-dominated sport, yet I have come to embrace my femininity as a strength. I can topple into an aid station, rummage around for a tampon, have a good cry, have a Snickers, have a laugh and then get up and get the hell on with it. It's not a catastrophe; it's all part of the ride.

I have struggled with my mental health since I was thirteen. From the outside, I'm a happy 'together' person yet there are times when my anxiety consumes my thoughts, telling me I just can't do it. It's lonely, it's scary and it's frustrating. Running has truly been my saviour; I just have to slip on my trainers and I feel a sense of control and power. "I can't" becomes "I can." Running long distances doesn't scare me, curveballs thrown by the terrain and weather don't scare me; I've got through bigger battles.

Have a cry, have a Snickers, have a laugh, get up and get the hell on with it.

I say this because I am just like any other woman. I'm not a full-time runner; I'm a teacher and fit my training in around my work commitments. I often come home and realise I forgot to get milk. I frequently lose my keys. I'm not extraordinary. If, however, I can inspire one pupil in my class that they can do something that they never thought possible, then, for me, that is an extraordinary thing.

Because being ordinary is brave, being ordinary is resilient, being ordinary is extraordinary. So many women are going about being their ordinary selves every day and not realising that they already have within them the drive and mental stamina to say: "Come on; let's do this!" too.







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### The event

We have both run many Phoenix events, but 24 hours around the athletics track at The SportsHUB Running Track in Walton-on-Thames was a first. The race started at 08:00 on Friday 04.03.22, and from this point, you had 24 hours to complete as many loops of the 400 metre track as you chose. The format was very flexible, you could start and stop as you wished, complete a chosen distance, keep on going as long as you could, or even change your mind if you needed to. There were also other events going on throughout the day on the track (a 12 hour challenge, and 3 x 6 hour challenges). The organisation was second to none, each runner had chip timing from Timing Monkey and there were screens to show how many laps you had completed, and there was a fantastic aid station. We ran the whole thing together, and here is our report.

### Pre-event thoughts/ training

**Sarah:** I must admit I do love a track event. The atmosphere a track event brings is like being caught in a bubble that you can't escape from (in a good way!). You get to chat and catch up with people you'd normally wave at or say 'well done' to as they pass you never to be seen again. My first ultra was in November 2016 which was also my first Phoenix event. Since then I've run 86 ultras which include 14 x 100 milers, one of these was Track 100 with Cockbain Events in October 2020 and having enjoyed that I thought 24 hours running round a track would be a challenge to see how far I could run rather than aim for a distance. There was no specific training done for this event, my training tends to be the marathon/ultra events I do leading up to another event mixed with a few shorter runs during the week and online Moves Fitness aerobics classes for a bit of cross training.

**Amy:** This was my first 24-hour track event, my main reason for entering it was to see if I could do it. I did my first ultra marathon in 2009 and have done a fair amount since (72 official ultra events and 60 "non official" ones), and 8 x 100 milers, but none have been on a track, so this was different to all of them. I perceived that it would be predominantly a mental challenge, to see if I could keep doing the same loop over and over again. I was feeling very anxious about it. But, Sarah had done things like it before, and had positive things to say about the experience, so I was curious to try it myself. I didn't do any specific training for it, I am usually doing one or two marathons or ultras per weekend at the moment, plus shorter runs to and from work in the week, plenty of walking and yoga, so I figured I had enough miles in my legs to get round it.



### The experience

People were gathering at the track from around 07:00, and the atmosphere had frissons of excitement running right through it. Our little group met up, and placed our kit boxes by the side of the track, amongst the vast array of professional looking kit already arranged in the area. We collected our timing chips, had a last minute safety wee (in the luxury loos in the track-side building), and then it was over the starting mat, and away, for 24 hours!





We started off anti-clockwise, and the direction changed every 3 hours (when if you were lucky, Race Director Rik would dress up as a traffic cone, and mark the place of turning). We also had a rule that we got a chocolate Freddo from the aid station each time we changed direction. The aid station was first class (including a giant pizza delivery at 20:00), filled with delectable delights (sweets, cakes, crisps, water, squash, coke, tea, a coffee machine, and soup) and was passed every 400 metres. During some last minute preparation about running for 24 hours on a track, we discovered this might actually be an additional challenge, as the temptation would be to stop too often. Despite knowing the science for fuelling and hydration for ultras, the reality of what you can tolerate is often different to the recommendations. We both wore vests and carried water with us, so we could sip regularly. We listened to our bodies, and were careful to respond to how we felt in terms of energy; with the two of us doing this together, it worked out pretty well, and we ate little and often, sweet and salty, mostly from the aid station and topped up with some of our own

stock, and kept up our energy levels. We also developed the "Shrimp Technique" - an (until now) unknown ultra technique, whereby when either of us felt energy waning, next time we passed the aid station we would have some of the little foam pink shrimp sweets, walk a lap, and pretty much always would feel better. If we didn't, we'd just try something else. This seemed to work! Everyone is different, and you do learn what works best for you even if it is sweets and giant pretzels.

It was a very sociable event. With it being such a short loop, we saw our fellow 24 hour runners constantly, and with new faces joining in for the other events, there were always plenty of people to chat to. The encouragement and comradeship between everyone was brilliant.

We decided from the start that as the medal was in the shape of "24" that our aim was to run for the whole 24 hours, rather than worry about the distance covered. You received a gold "24" for 100+ miles and a silver "24" for under 100 miles. We set our Garmins to the time of day, so we couldn't see the distance. The screens displaying the lap numbers were quite small, so were easy to ignore if you wanted to. This strategy worked really well, and it felt quite relaxed. The first time we felt we needed to check our distance, we had already covered 76.1 miles, and only at around 90 miles in, when we were quite tired, did we need to adopt a more structured strategy of running two laps and walking one.

It was very cold, and a bit rainy during the day. Turns out that tracks are pretty windy and chilly places. But actually in the day time, it was pretty nice for running in. Overnight the temperature really dropped, and many layers were needed to keep warm. Don't put off putting on extra layers even if you are going to be back at your kit box in 400 metres. As soon as one of us started to feel the cold we picked up our kit boxes and headed for the changing rooms to change and add more layers.

The flood lights went out at 22:00, and the night section was a head torch section, which was great fun. Actually, the lights momentarily went off quite a long time before 22:00, due to a technical hitch, which was quite a moment of excitement, with everyone suddenly plunged into darkness. This forced us all to find our head torches, so by the time the lights went out properly at 22:00, we were all organised for it. The darkness brought a change in the atmosphere, the night section feeling like a different event to the day time. As is usually the case when we run together, the longer we have been running, the more random our chatter became (although we have yet to run far enough to run out of things to talk about).

As the new day arrived and a very uninspiring sunrise, we switched off our head torches, and the last couple of hours were in the light. The track was pretty quiet by now, and the mood seemed to change to a more reflective air. We finished our last lap at 08:00 and completed 109.9 miles (442 x 400 m laps) in 24:03:06 and finished joint 2nd ladies and joint 3rd overall.

## Reflections

**Sarah:** I think I'm quite good at being in complete denial about 100 milers and other events and don't think too much about them until the morning of the event, then get really nervous and ultimately it's too late to really worry because you're there and it's time to start.

Amy and I run so well together and we know how to keep a check on each other. We've run 5 x 100 milers together so far and many marathons/ultras. Some people would say that we're far too happy and smiley but why sign up to these things if they're going to make you miserable.

The one thing I would do differently is have warmer gloves – you'd think by now I'd know my hands get cold.

Would I do this again? Yes, I've already signed up for Track Wars XI – Fury with Phoenix Running on 2nd September 2022.

Amy: I had been worried more about the mental challenge rather than the physical side of things, but it turned out to be completely the other way around. I found running on a completely flat, consistent surface for the whole time was difficult, and I got quite a bit of hip pain. Mentally, I found it much easier than I anticipated. I loved being around so many people, chatting with different people for different laps. Being with Sarah the whole time was a massive help; being with someone you trust and know well, can talk rubbish with, and feel comfortable to say how you are really finding things, I think is a very big bonus on adventures like these. I managed to completely switch off thinking about laps, and stop worrying about distances and times, and just enjoyed being there.

Things I would do differently are related to kit. My kit box was new, and it turns out that waterproof boxes are only waterproof if you put the lid on properly, which I didn't, as I wasn't used to using it. So a lot of my spare clothes and extra layers got wet. I also had shoes, which weren't new, but I had never run more than about 10 km in at a time. I had very sore feet by half way, so ended up changing into some reliable old trail shoes with a hole in them, which saved the day for the second half.

*Would I do this again?* **100% yes!**





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# TV Track Wars 24 Hours Destiny or Den- sity?

Written by the grumpy runner  
grumpyrunner.com

That Usain Bolt, he runs on a track. His races last about 10-20 seconds – not even a full loop. Then you get the ‘long-distance’ runners – 10,000 metres or 25 laps – they’re likely to be done within about half an hour. So, when someone suggests running around a track for 24 hours straight, your brain should automatically be calculating what is humanly possible. 100 miles seems like a more than realistic target. I mean, how hard can 403 laps be?

## Usain Bolt:

Bolt’s typical 200 metre pace for 24 hours is roughly 500 miles. Sub-3-minute miles might be a bit too ambitious. Let’s assume Bolt adds in some ‘lightning bolts’, loo stops and takes things a bit easier. Let’s call it 250 miles. Not bad going Mr Bolt!

## Joshua Cheptegei:

Cheptegei is the fastest human over 10,000 metres on foot – with a frankly frightening 26 minutes and 11 second PB. 4 minutes and 13 seconds per mile. That’d be 341 miles in 24 hours. Again, I’d assume this pace is a touch too ambitious. Let’s trim that to about 6 minutes per mile, and we’re left with around 240 miles.

Both examples seem wildly unrealistic until you look at the stats of Aleksandr ‘Sania’ Sorokin.

## Aleksander Sorokin:

Let’s get the important info out of the way to begin with. Sorokin is the 100-mile record holder, the 24-hour record holder, the 12-hour record holder. The Lithuanian is pretty good at this running thing, but he’s hardly a household name. In January 2022, Sorokin smashed his previous 100-mile record by 23 minutes, finishing in 10:51:39. And he carried on, breaking 110 miles in 12 hours. Sorokin’s current 24-hour record stands at 192.3 miles. Surely 200 miles in 24 hours is just a matter of time.

Armed with all this hypothetical knowledge, my ridiculous self-belief and a partner who’d agreed to do school drop-off and pick-up for me, I headed on down to the Elmbridge Xcel Sports Hub in Walton upon Thames for Phoenix Running’s Track Wars 24 – Destiny. If Bolt could run 250 miles, I ‘knew’ 125 miles or 200 km was achievable.

Phoenix Running boss, Rik Vercoe holds the world record for fastest 10 marathons in 10 cumulative days (29:54:56). Almost every weekend, you’ll find Vercoe under a gazebo along the Thames Path or at a Surrey vineyard, helping a tribe of devoted runners achieve some astonishing challenges. Phoenix’s 6-hour running events have become synonymous with the 100-marathon club, although some of its regulars are well beyond that number.

It was a cool, grey Friday morning in March. The race was only 5 miles from home, I cycled to the track.

One of the mums at school drop-off is a well-known ski racer. When I’d mentioned the race to her, the morning before, she told me I was mad. And then told me to drink beetroot juice. As I stood on the start line, I realised she might be right – just not about the beetroot juice.

There were 50 places on the start list for the 24-hour. Plus, a bunch of 12- and 6-hour entries. Maybe 100 in total. I recognised some names and faces. I figured I’d have time to get to know a few of them. The start had a 15-minute window to get moving. I waited until the last moment before crossing the line. At 8am, my 24 hours began.

With around 100 people on track, you’d think it would get congested, but the runners, joggers and walkers fell into a natural rhythm. The guidance from Vercoe’s pre-race brief suggested slower runners use lane 2 or move out when faster runners were passing. Some did. Some didn’t.

I’d been given a copy of Michael Stocks’ book *Single Track Mind*, a few days previously.



It's about Stocks' attempt to qualify for the Great Britain 24-hour team. I'd fervently read it in the hopes that it would give me the secret to successful track running. Stocks mentioned things like training, nutrition plans, pacing strategies, coaches, and sports psychologists. I'd only signed up a week ago on a whim – I had none of these.

I thought I needed to keep a bit of an eye on my heart rate. If I could control that, then the rest of the run should look after itself.

I ran to feel for the first few hours. And I felt good. I was eating well. I was drinking regularly. I was moving well (perhaps a little too well), and my heart rate was staying low. And then I started looking at my watch. I could see my heartrate creeping up and up. And I kept on looking. And looking.

Rex Brillantes – there's a name to remember! Brillantes was leading the race from the start. His tactics appeared to involve running fast. He was lapping me with surprising frequency. Was it too much too early? Time would tell.

Sophie Power came up on my shoulder. I didn't know her, but I recognised the name. She was moving well. A shade faster than me. She'd cover perhaps 10 laps versus my 9. We fell into step together and chatted for a few loops. We discussed goals. Power wanted an [automatic Spartathlon qualifier](#) – just under 133 miles (215km). I told her that I'd like to cover 200km (125 miles) as it was a nice round number. I had an inkling that I was slightly out of my depth and had no idea what I was doing.

Weirdly, I started telling anyone I spoke to that I wanted to hit 200km. I became fixated on that target. My phone vibrated in my belt – it was a message from Camille Herron saying, 'good luck' (I'd mentioned this run while interviewing her a few days before). Was this the boost/motivation I needed?

I passed through the marathon and 50km points with PBs. Welcome surprises and confidence boosters. Tracks make running easy. I felt really good. But that heart rate...

I slowed down to settle my pulse. I broke my natural rhythm. And I never found any rhythm again.

I was taking more and more walk breaks. Every time I saw my heart rate rise, I slowed down. Every time I sped up – my heartrate spiked. It was a vicious circle.

50 miles came in a blur – around 9 hours. Another massive PB. Why do I normally run hilly things? This is so much easier.

I got chatting to Sophie Power again. Brillantes had stopped lapping us. All day, Power had been looking solid. Nothing had changed. I told

Power she would win this race. Power told me, she didn't care about the win, it was all about the qualifier, and with that, she drifted ahead. I slowed to a walk.

A blister. Maybe two. I never get blisters. But these were new shoes bought especially for this race – road shoes with only 20 miles of breaking in. I sat down to fix the blisters. My first aid kit is so old that the blister plasters had gone a bit crispy. I popped, squeezed, and taped the two toes. 20 minutes of faffing. I got angry with myself for wasting so much time.

I ran two more laps. The crispy blister plasters were rubbing. It felt like they would cause another blister. I ripped them off and slathered the toes in antiseptic cream. I tried to charge my phone. My battery pack was dead. My anger went through the roof. I met Graeme Boxall at the Suffolk Backyard in 2021. He was on the crew for Matthew Blackburn, the eventual runner-up. I was working as part of the volunteer crew. With an 81-hour race, we had a lot of time to get to know each other around the camp – and he is about as nice a bloke as you can imagine. Boxall was running well. Slowly, but surely, he was unlapping himself from me. I was walking almost exclusively now. I was swearing and muttering to myself. He told me to get on with it. I told him to fuck right off.

It took me over 3 hours to cover miles 50-60. By this point, I couldn't see 200km happening. I couldn't even see 100 miles happening. My head had gone. Not even a message from Sorokin could save me now!

My mouth tasted salty. My legs felt empty. I couldn't work out what was going so wrong. My hips hurt while walking. I figured that salty taste meant I'd had too much salt. I had been eating gels exclusively. I started cramming sugary sweets into me from the tuck-shop aid station – they weren't helping either.

Despite being the perfect running temperature, it wasn't the perfect walking-slowly temperature. I pulled on my hoodie to warm up. I jogged. Too hot. Hoodie off. I walked. Too cold. Hoodie on. Repeat. And repeat.

I asked the timekeeper, Karen Webber, how many laps I needed to get to 100km. '12', she told me.

I started running. Nothing in the tank. I tried power walking. Still nothing. Every time I passed the timing monkey, I'd ask her how many. She stopped answering me quite quickly and directed me to the lap counter display or advised me to use basic maths by subtracting one from the previous lap's target.

Three laps to go. If I hit 100km, I'd be grand, I can call it a day.

And so, I did.

I stopped after 13ish hours at 100km (63 miles) – just as the pizza delivery arrived.

I ate. I showered. I ate some more. I hung around offering moral support to the fools still running around in circles. The floodlights turned off. The head torches turned on. I picked up my 24-hour medal. There was no glorious feeling.

I cycled home – picking up another massive takeaway pizza on the way – and I passed out on the sofa.

When I woke in the morning, I had no pain. My hips were fine. I had energy. I'd clearly not eaten enough. I felt like I had no energy because I'd had no energy. I just couldn't

recognise the signs. I was now filled with remorse and regrets.

If (that's a big IF) I did another one of these, I would change three things:

- + Find a crew
- + Turn off watch alerts and metrics
- + Don't set targets

Oh, and if all hope is lost:

+ Quick shower, change kit, eat and resume  
I reached for my phone to see how everyone else was getting on. The early race leader, Brillantes, had drifted down the leaderboard. It's a classic tortoise vs hare scenario. My reporters on the ground told me he'd gone for a shower and fallen asleep in the changing room for 5 hours – eventually finishing 5th. Maybe changing the kit wasn't the solution for him.

The next hour or so was on constant refresh. Sophie Power was clearly going to win, stretching her lead with every circuit. As 8am rolled around, I rechecked the required qualification standard. With a massive two lap cushion, Power achieved her Spartathlon auto-qualifier – covering 132.7 miles. Paced to perfection.

In retrospect, for my run, there was nothing to be disappointed by. PBs fell all day. Gone are the days when I needed to keep an eye on cut-offs and sweepers looming large behind me. This 24 (well 13) hour event was always about testing kit, tactics, nutrition, moving forward, and discovering where my head was at.

Turns out 403 laps isn't easy. However, until Bolt or Cheptegei sign up for a 24-hour event, I guess I am still better, on paper, than the pair of them. Sorokin and Sophie Power on the other hand...

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During the waite escapes I will be focusing a lot on self-care and wellness. Life gets so busy, stress often takes over. We become so absorbed with what life throws at us that we often forget who we are. Let's use this time together to explore who we are again, to practice scheduled 'us times'. At the end of the day, if we cannot recharge and find strength in what's around and inside us, then how can we possibly pass this on to those close to us?

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Written by Rob Cowlin

# T R A C K W A R S

# INFINITY

As companions and competitors muster at the side of the track, there is a tide of anxiousness resting beneath a swell of humble smiles, bold aims and nervous laughter. As with any run, we arrived with our own goals and visions, but quickly realise that there is nowhere to hide the usual cocktail of suffering and strife, which even under the flash of head torches will be lit up for all to see.

The 400m loop appears flat, without a hazardous root or branch in sight and there is no rain against all the odds. However, the infinite loop is without mercy, inviting all comers to cross the timing mat “just once more” to better their adversaries, their expectations or themselves. Therein lies the true challenge; that every loop there is the chance to escape from the seemingly endless cycle - to sit down, go rest or go home entirely - inviting resignation and creating the ultimate not-giving-up competition.

As runners set off it is so easy and common to forget your own targets and to latch onto the nearest runner, whether seeking the comfort of friends or chasing foes, you are never far away from either. The forgivingly short nature of the laps makes it easy to forget that there are 24 hours of

those loops to negotiate. It goes against your running instinct to such a degree you are forced to verbally remind yourself, just as you must discipline your food, drink, salt and everything else that keeps you alive and kicking the clay for an entire day.

Settling myself into a more sensible pace after the collective hysteria of a fast first hour for most participants, I am trying to compensate for my lack of discipline in all the above categories and trying to forget fundamentals I have learned from previous 100 mile efforts – most of which would already suggest my efforts are terminal. I reset my expectations and relax a little, and all of the uncertain aspects begin to work in my favour. Jogging, mingling and conversations about anything other than running resets my muscles with the nutrition I've taken on. Six hours in and growing in strength, there is a comeback on...

Running, as with almost everything in life for we humans, is as mental as it is physical. Whether we view ourselves as competitors or completers, it's only natural that when we see others struggling – slowing, slouching and staggering off track – it can give us both a kick of empathy and impetus. We realise we are not alone in our struggles and that everyone from the front to the back of the pack goes through the same motion and emotion we do. We feel each other's pain and take strength from it.

As the mutual, compassionate *schadenfreude* flows through my aching legs I find myself back in rhythm. I exchange stories and share laughter with those orbiting the track alongside me, distracting me from the fact I am now running almost as well as I was 10 hours previously. Some amazing reset takes place within, simply through food, drink and the desire to keep going. I even find the energy as the sun sets through the clouds to shout-sing some Meatloaf anthems before the shortfall in fitness and training begins to dawn on me with the sky now blanketed in darkness.

Despite taking the decision to stop just shy of 50 miles and after almost 12 hours on my now aching feet, those last laps will be remembered as my victory laps. While in another season I may have demanded more from my body and mind, some recent challenges in my life required me to swallow my pride and adjust my aims. As long as we remain humble, determined and love what we do, it will all work out in the long run.

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## THE JOURNEY TO THE ROCK

Written by Jaide Downs



Most great stories begin with a questionable decision. This questionable decision of course felt like a magnificent idea at first. I decided, with the help of my smart friend Andrea, that I could successfully finish The Last Annual Vol State 500k.



I relentlessly followed the 2020 race and then clung to my phone for what seemed like an eternity waiting for the 2021 registration to open. While mindlessly scrolling Facebook, I found that someone had announced the race was open. Alas, the post was about five minutes old. I was sure I was out of luck but hopped over to UltraSignup anyway. Like a crazed woman, I ran outside and pointed my phone to the sky to get the best internet signal. Oh, the things we resort to in rural America. To my surprise I instantly was in. Gleeful screams, jumping and panic ensued. I was a whirlwind of emotion, bouncing like a pinball off the walls. My husband had zero clue as to what was happening and was most likely searching for the number to the nearest mental hospital. Within a matter of minutes, we were informed that there was a glitch in the system and entry would be resumed later. Was I in? Was I out? I really couldn't tell you if I waited minutes or hours, but it felt like days. My husband clearly grew more concerned by the minute as I sat on the edge of my chair, biting my nails and frantically rocking back and forth. It was becoming clearer to him that I should be committed. Some small shred of luck finally came my way. Only a handful of us had entered the race on round one, so we were allowed to keep our spots. Again, with the screams and jumping. It felt like the biggest running high of my life, and I wasn't even close to the starting line yet. And this is where the LAVS roller coaster began.

I had just under a year to train. How on earth does one train for 314 miles in Tennessee in July? Fabulous question, especially when you live in the high desert of Oregon. Heat I can handle, in fact, I love it, but humidity made me nervous. Where I live poses some hurdles. I am the only runner where I live, so I have no training partners and no exercise facilities. There are no routes I can take that allow me to refuel and there definitely aren't any restrooms. Turns out these would be huge assets in the long run (yes, pun intended).

Well, all those months absolutely flew by. Life seemed to be a blur. Where did my training time go and had I done enough? I surely knew I had spoken about Vol State plenty. People willing to



mentor me (Chris, Scott, Bev and Scott #2) for the entire year were probably ready to change their phone numbers. And my husband? Probably still thinking he married a crazed lunatic.

Just as fast as all those months flew by, I had flown into TN. I got a cozy room and waited to be picked up by a LAVS veteran named Nicole. With us we had in tow the powerhouse, Bev Abbs. To say she was the most down-to-earth person ever was an understatement. But I still felt like I was entirely out of place in that little car. We shared breakfast and each went to our separate hotels. Later in the day while walking to lunch I was joined by BJ, whose knowledge and stories were equally intriguing. Upon returning to the hotel runners began to arrive. I felt I was in some parallel universe. I didn't know anyone, and yet I knew them all! I finally met Chris, Jan (the meatwagon driver), Laz and the list goes on. It was very apparent that I was home, and these were my people.

Through our travels to the start, I continued to gain knowledge from the Abbs, Chris and a few others. I finally connected with both gentlemen from Oregon and made a pact that we all must finish this race within the 10 day time limit. I also had the pleasure of meeting my new friend, Ray. Ray is an ultra legend and math whizz. Admittedly I was wondering who this guy was and why was he predicting my race finishing time?! Once I learned more about Ray it all started making sense. Again, while I felt right at home, I also felt like an imposter. I was in the company of giants. Literal legends. Who the heck let me in this race? I mean, here I was just hoping to finish but also on the same Whatsapp chat as Bob Hearn, who was freaking out about shoes and his next ice supply. So nice to see that we all freak out about the same things, while simultaneously wondering why really fast people even stress?

We did the romantic ferry ride as we tried to hide our jitters and before we knew it, Laz was lighting that famous cigarette. I had been cigarette-free for nearly eight years, but in that moment of panic I never wanted one more. Anything to take the edge off. I knew I needed to be conservative, so I hung with my friend Chris and his buddy Kevin

for a short time. Unfortunately, Kevin had to pull out early. This would only be the beginning of people dropping out. It couldn't be my story. I had promised my son Thaddius, who was following my progress with starry eyes, that I wouldn't crawl into Jan's van. And you just can't make a promise like that and not follow through.

The first 40-something miles had been a complete lie. They seemed easy. I enjoyed Burger King and my first of many calls to Andrea. Spirits were high coming into the Dresden Farmers Market. While refueling there, Chris caught up to me and saved me from a wrong turn leaving Dresden before leaving me in the dust. This would be the last time I saw him. Soon after, I found myself in the wonderful company of the Gleason Fire Department. This is known to be a favorite stop among Vol Staters. A grand buffet of pizzas, sodas and other snacks. One glorious shower and a variety of sleeping options. The plan was to clean up, fuel and perhaps lay down. But LAVS laughs at your plans, every miserable step of the way!

As I lay on my air mattress, a predicted storm rolled in. Rain, lightning, and thunder surrounded us. Runners lay on the floor moaning from unimaginable cramps. Now generally, weather won't keep me from a run but heading out in lightning made me nervous. Things seemed to take a turn at this point in the game. One gentleman passed out, one tree went down outside, and the power went out. While I was prepared for heat and not rain, I was really starting to see why people had continually told me the LAVS course will laugh at your "plans". Any fantasies I had of how I would handle this race were quickly being washed away in the downpour. As the weather was taking a short break, I noticed some gentlemen hitting the road and decided to tag along.

I believe our little pack had about five people in it, but my eyes were heavy and beginning to deceive me. As everyone hit their own strides, our group quickly dissolved. And there I was, stuck with Ben, better known as "Benny brown towel". At the very beginning of the race, he called me out for my Nebraska Huskers patch on my vest. I instantly knew we were going to share some laughs. Ben and I trudged along the first two evenings together. First laughing, then struggling and then just complaining to each other. Ben seemed to have some very lofty goals for his race finish. Something like four or five days? This race was a first for us both. Had nobody made him aware of what he was in for? But who was I to say he couldn't? Only he could decide that.

We started experiencing all of the fun we had so childishly anticipated. Ben's shorts failed him imme-

"We started experiencing all of the fun we had so childishly anticipated"

diately. Blisters and chafing reared their ugly heads. Sleep deprivation hit hard. We abruptly drowned our ailments in Desitin as this seemed to be the favorite fix - all on the course. But the oddest sensation was how the smell of food the first morning absolutely made our stomachs roll. Our bodies needed calories more than ever, but our guts rebelled. Thankfully, this was a fleeting feeling. Upon a little café we stumbled hungrier than a high school football team. We draped our extra set of wet clothes and underwear on the chairs out front for the world to see (and to signal other runners perhaps) and made ourselves comfortable inside. I honestly can't remember much other than it was the best breakfast of our entire lives, or at least we thought so at the time. Somewhere down the line of sharing stories of our families back home, Benny and I fell out of pace with each other. I watched him trot into the sunrise with a few gentlemen as I slowly rolled down the highway feeling like an overbaked potato.

Little did I know that I'd be trudging along for many miles alone. At first this was welcomed; it felt like home to me. Lost in my own thoughts and taking in this new world. I chatted with locals when given the chance and took advantage of every road angel stop. I knew my husband and mother were states away worried for my safety on the open road of rural Tennessee. But in a sense, I had never felt safer. Besides, the two people most worried about me have been the people who have most shaped the strong, independent woman I have become. More phone calls and texts to my mom, sisters, husband, son and Andrea all while I knocked more miles down. I seemed to have hit a decent rhythm, until the rain started. And boy, it was unrelenting.

I would hit periods of bright blue skies, just to then be hit with random downpours. Sometimes I would see runners, but other times were filled with great seclusion. The rain slowly eroded my spirits. I found myself on a two-lane highway, somewhere between some astonishingly decent gas station pizza and Linden, questioning my decisions. The rain was almost constant now and so were the stomach



cramps from that delectable pizza. But I pushed on as traffic was heavy and there were zero spots to squat. I prairie dogged it for multiple miles. Sweat poured from my brow and my cheeks grew tired of clenching. What would I do? Where would I go? Whose freaking idea was this? And then, the real question came to fruition. Ruin my shorts or squat for all to see as they drove by? You better believe at least 20 cars got a show that day! Thank goodness for wet wipes and no one calling me in for indecent exposure.

After one of my greatest evacuations to date, I tossed my shame and pride alongside that highway, never to be seen again. Feeling much lighter, my pace quickened, and I felt renewed. This was about the time where I would meet Melissa. I really didn't want to like her as she had a crew and I chose to be "screwed". We frequently flip flopped as I scurried on and she would get pampered with real food, dry clothes and roses. Ok, ok, an exaggeration, but still! But Melissa was hard to hate. A kind soul with passion and drive. Every day she would offer me aid or food that I could not and would not accept. We both knew the rules, but her kindness would not allow her to at least offer me help. The long crawl down into Linden seemed to stretch on. I pulled aside in the rain to pee, but my legs refused to make a squatting position. I carefully pulled my shorts aside to take care of things when all of a sudden I was finally warming up. My eyes opened wide and I realized that I had failed to pull the liner of my shorts aside. Yes folks, add peeing my shorts to the list. Morally, I was beat down. All I wanted was to take a real

shower and have a small reprieve from this rain. I struggled into the doors of the Commodore and propped myself up on the front desk knowing I smelled of straight up urine. They had no rooms available. Not a single one. Tears fell from my eyes. I begged to sleep in the broom closet. To my surprise the owners took pity and let me rent a room that was also their makeshift office. More tears! I can only imagine these people were hoping I'd shower immediately, which I did. I also enjoyed a multitude of foods from their restaurant before passing out. I made sure to set an alarm for three hours so that I could get back on the road. Yet again, LAVS had other plans. The storm grew strong and fierce and my will to not quit was weak. I felt hopeless, beat down and torn apart. Not even sure if I could keep going. No, I could not call Jan. I slept the storm away and spent entirely too much time in Linden. As morning approached, I crept out to the lobby to check on the conditions. While the weather was improving, the bar of the restaurant was not. The sweet people of the Commodore had taken pity on my fellow racers and allowed them to sleep on the couches and floors with pillows and blankets. This is where my friendship with Jim and Vicky began (lovingly referred to as the "Halsi" on course). They are a power couple beating the course down hand-in-hand. They would become part of my tribe as we forged through Tennessee.

Feeling rested and no longer smelling like a urinal, I merrily skipped down the pavement. Not really. The two giant blisters on the balls of my feet restricted any such shenanigans. Around this time, I reconnected with my buddy, Jeff, from Oregon. If not on the same mile, we would continually check in with each other. Our comradery was comforting. While we came from the same state, we had no prior knowledge of each other, but it was as if we had always been friends. I kept crossing little towns off my map, sometimes ahead of my new friends and sometimes behind. The funny thing is, we could all agree on how long a town seemed. First, you'd see the sign and feel excitement for services, only to find you might have five more miles to the actual town. On top of that, reaching the other side of town felt like an eternity. Columbia was the never-ending town for me.

I knew I'd be staying at the Richland but getting there was a battle. I stopped at a gas station in the middle of town and laid next to the building in the shade to take a small nap. There were so many people out and about, I felt a 20-minute nap would be a safe bet. Upon opening my eyes from my siesta, I noticed a young man sitting on the edge of his car enjoying a cigarette, staring at me. A little freaked out, I started to put my shoes on. He smiled and flashed his name badge; he was employed by this gas station and was on break. He proclaimed that I looked so peaceful, and he didn't want anyone to bother me, so he stood watch over me. Now, my dad had passed away when I was six, but I always knew his presence was always surrounding me. This day, his presence was in this young man. I wanted to cry and bear hug him, but I controlled myself. I think about whoever this kid is often. Wish I could repay him and hope for all good things to come his way.

Finally making my way to the Richland, I checked in and let Jeff know my room would be available by the time he arrived. I enjoyed a shower, a gas station biscuit, yet another soda and passed out hard. When I came to, I cleaned out my pack and refilled my water. Merrily making my way down the course I notice a text from Jeff. Feeling too lazy to pull my phone out, I decided to check it later. Ten minutes go by and he texts yet again. Wondering if he is ok, I realize I better check my phone. First text from Jeff "Did you throw a burrito in the trash can of the hotel room?" Second text from Jeff "It was freaking delicious!" I loudly screamed and full belly laughed. The burrito had lived in my pack for a good 24 hours when I realized it was only dead weight to me, so I had thrown it out before leaving. I was mortified at what it might do to Jeff, but only time would



tell us.

More miles would find us resting our heads in Shelbyville. Not exactly where anyone should be after dark. Thankfully I was traveling with Jeff who was now covered head to toe in Desitin. No way would that draw attention to us. We went against every single suggestion and tried to clean up and recuperate at the Magnolia. It is no exaggeration when I tell you this place is fit for no human, nor the giant spider under the bed or the poor frog stuck in the shower drain. I'm mighty sure people rent these overpriced rooms by the hour but I can assure you that you wouldn't want to pay for one minute here. Move on and pray the bed bugs didn't catch a ride out with you.

We trudged along in the dark and I continued to struggle to stay awake. I've found that constant chatter helps me keep my mind off the exhaustion. Jeff, too, found this out, but being the nice guy he put it to me lightly. "Ya know, we don't have to talk, we can just be quiet," Jeff exclaimed. Holy Hannah, I was mortified. Here I was flapping my gab, annoying him to death. We went a few more miles in silence before I peeled off to sleep in a gazebo. As much as Jeff was enjoying that quiet, lonely road, I was enjoying what I thought to be a quiet nesting spot. Just as sleep found me, I was shook awake by the rumbling of the railroad tracks and a loudly blaring train whistle. Nap time was over.

Somewhere after my short-lived nap in Wartrace, I found myself pushing for a campground that was to be an amazing place of showers, sleeping arrangements, food and coffee. But only a couple of miles beforehand at about 4am, and a close encounter with a skunk, I was staring into two very bright headlights. A gentleman named Vincent hollered out to me and pointed just up the way. He and his wife, Robin, had a lovely aid station set up for us. I grabbed a drink from the cooler and headed for a cot located on their porch. Fluffy pillows and giant, heavy comforters that smelled like flowers surrounded me. I slept for a solid two hours until Robin greeted me with offerings of breakfast and soda. I could have sat on her porch all day. It was as if we were old friends playing catch up. While it is most accurate to say people in Tennessee are some of the best, I can assure you that they broke the mold with Robin.

Feeling happy and a bit emotional to be leaving Robin's home, I pushed on to Whispering Oaks Campground for a shower, yet again running into Dexter and Michael. These two had a knack for making me laugh every single time I ran into them on course. If you ever wonder how one can successfully run for 24+ hours, it's the people you meet. Yes, ability counts for something, but the friends who laugh and suffer with you is really how it's done. I tried not to waste time here, but coffee was of utmost importance. Finding coffee on this course seemed to be nearly impossible for me, so it was absolutely necessary to take advantage of this. With just over 70 miles, I felt like we were racing again. It was time to suck it up, and perhaps brush my teeth.

I constantly look back and wonder how exactly I would have survived the last push without Dexter. His determination carried us both up Monteagle in the dark and had us crawling through a downed tree across the road. We laughed and carried on about different people we met and one woman who gave us the most concerned look and "God bless you"

after she learned what we were up to. Just a bunch of delirious heathens shuffling down the hot highway hoping to see Jan in her meatwagon so we could give her some laughs. We sang made-up songs of the struggle bus we were on as I careened at blazing speeds dragging Dexter down the mountain into Jasper. I can't remember how many times the poor man asked me to slow down. A sigh of relief hit him when we hit the Smalling residence at mile 295. I did a brief fixing of my feet and decided to head on, leaving Dexter to recover from our downhill sprint.

Coming into Kimball I had planned to take a short nap at my hotel, clean up and eat. Again, LAVS always has different plans for you. I bathed, caught up on messages from friends and family and decided a nap was not on the cards for me. I felt like I had drunk a gallon of coffee. I was ready to finish what I had started seven days ago. One gas station hot dog and I was back on the road towards the famous blue bridge.

The blue bridge in my mind is where one starts celebrating. You are in the home stretch and nothing can stop you. It was as glorious and emotional as I thought. While breaking to take it all in, things hit home for me. I had gathered my bearings and realized that this day would have been my late father's birthday. How fitting. Knowing he was on all my life journeys this couldn't have

been more perfect. So, I called my son and husband and alerted them of my soon-to-be finish. It was really happening.

Before leaving the blue bridge, I text Karl as instructed. Something to the tune of "wake up, it's time to party. I'm coming in hot!" Karl, skeptical for good reason, didn't take me too seriously. Sand Mountain lay ahead and it could take runners hours to climb it. But with wings on my shoes, one hot dog and a Dr Pepper in my belly, and delirium playing in my favor, I was holding a decent jogging pace. Pace enough that I believe I passed a few people and even jogged up most of the mountain. I remember singing and feeling on top of the world like never before. All these turns were looking familiar even in the dark. And just like that I was making my way through a cornfield alone, in the dark.

I could hear the chatter of people and then I was on top of a mountain kissing "The Rock". I did it. Despite all the blisters, chafing and obstacles. All the training, all the fussing and all the days trying to balance preparation and life, I was the soul who was on the rock for that moment of time. As I was escorted to the "throne" (a smelly lawn chair coveted by us all), I saw Jeff who had just finished. We relaxed sipping sodas while telling Laz, Karl and Sandra our tales from the road.

It's hard to describe why we do these extreme things. Even to other runners, this is extreme. Maybe we like the uncertainty. Maybe it's the small element of danger. Maybe it's the pain. What I am certain of is we do it for a feeling that we always get to carry with us. The feeling of accomplishment and pride.



# LORNA RUNS THREE PEAKS JOGLE

Written by Lorna Cullen



I want to be 99% self-supported. I will, however, need support for the mountains and may ask loved ones and friends to deliver my hiking boots to me en-route for the mountain climbs. It would be lovely for them to hike those parts with me as well. It would also be wonderful for people to run with me along the way, even if it is only for a short time.

I'll be 54 by September. I've been dreaming about this adventure for 6-7 years. Life has simply got in the way of me doing it sooner, the last two years particularly. I ultimately don't know what I'm truly capable of. That makes this challenge both incredibly exciting and daunting in equal measures. But I also can't imagine giving up under any circumstances.

I have a rough plan for the route but will be mostly working it out as I go along as I want this to be an adventure - what could go wrong? I don't want the way to be micro-planned before I set off. I think it's more exciting to plan my route along the way, chat to the locals and hopefully find more interesting paths and trails to run each day.

My timeline is based around work. They've been kind enough to give me the time off. Nonetheless I had to set a timeframe so we could arrange cover. That means I've got to be completed within seven weeks. In order to achieve this I'm looking at averaging 26-27 miles a day apart from the three mountain climb days. I also have three wiggle room days to play with in total. This will no doubt change. I will get lost, I will have strong days and I will have slower days. I may find shorter routes, I may have to divert but eh, who cares? I am out for the adventure.

I've been training with North Endurance since last June. My coach, Paul, is primarily a triathlon coach and is excellent. This was a deliberate decision as I wanted to do lots of cross training to build fitness and reduce the chance of injury. I've now built up to an average week of 10-12 hours' training. Last week, for example, I completed 45 minutes swimming, 1.25 hours cycling, 4 hours running, 2 hours strength work and 3.5 hours hiking with a weighted backpack. I am now discovering that repeated training sessions are having less impact on my body and mind, I can work out day after day.

I've had to buy a lot of new gear for the run, which hasn't been cheap, but I've tried to buy bits over a long period of time so I've not been hit by the cost all at once. I've micro-managed the grams of each item as I want to keep my backpack weight to a minimum. I had a year out

of running a few years ago due to a bad back. This makes carrying as little as possible crucial for me. I'll only take what I need to survive.

I've got a Montane Trailblazer 30L backpack, an ultralight waterproof Montane jacket (which is superb), the Terra Nova Laser Compact 1 tent and a Sea to Summit II sleeping bag. I've also got a mini Sawyer filter and an Evernew foldable hydration bag (the latter for scooping up the pre-filtered water). My latest addition is a Kraku stove from Alp-Kit as I want to be as self-sustainable as possible. One of the best things I am taking is a dot-tracker so my progress can be seen, this is being supplied by Roads of the Rose Limited. They have been super helpful in helping me choose the right type.

I'm really looking forward to time out on the trails and roads. I want to enjoy it 'during' and not after. I am aware, however, that I'll have really difficult days, which I currently can't comprehend from the comfort of my armchair. I don't think you can prepare for that. But I believe my dogged determination will get me through. It has also been brilliant getting help and information from the Yes Tribe group online; I have asked lots of questions and discovered lots of other people doing other fabulous adventures which I will watch and support closely.

As someone that's been going through menopause for a few years now, it was really important to me to choose this as one of the charities to raise money for. There is an amazing organisation called The Menopause Charity who want to get their message out and bring the process into the mainstream and stop it being hidden. After all, half of the people in the world will go through this, so let's talk about it!

The second charity I want to raise money for is MIND. I've suffered from anxiety before but especially during menopause. For me running and getting outside helps massively. However, descending steep hills can make me incredibly anxious and really test my mental strength. I'm also a mental health awareness officer at work. I think it's so important that workplaces are recognising this issue. Mental health is incredibly important to me personally and MIND is there to help provide helplines, information and support for anyone struggling with mental health.

I wrote in Issue 25 of Ultrarunning World Magazine in 2020 that I had a dream to do a long distance self-supported run and now it's only five months away. Where did the time go? Excited! Bring it on!



*"On 3 September this year I'm setting off to run from John O'Groats to Land's End via the three peaks of Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon. Covering circa 1,200 miles, I'll be carrying everything I need on my back, intending to camp wherever possible. Anyone I tell thinks I am mad, (probably), most who know me just understand how determined I can be"*

If you would like to follow my progress,

**Blog:** <https://lornatri.com>

**Twitter:** @LornaRunsJogle

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*conversation with God!”*

*“Ultra-distance running is a long*



Written by Shamita Achenbach-König

## 3100 Q & A

### *With Shamita Achenbach-König*

The Self-Transcendence 3100 mile race, the longest annual certified race in the world has established itself, since its inception in 1996, as a benchmark for multiday endurance athletes to rise to the challenge of running a distance beyond the grasp of the mind. On June 15th 2021, Frenchman Patrick Malandain, no stranger to long distance and unable to participate in the New York event, decided to run his own 3100 mile race in his home town of Montivilliers, near Le Havre in Normandy, France. Running from 6 am until about 8 pm in the evening on a 930m course, Patrick covered the distance in 50:11:24:00.

On September 17th at the same time that the Self-Transcendence 3100 mile race in New York began, Shamita Achenbach-König began her own 3100 journey on a 1km loop around a park in Vienna, Austria. The race has a 52 day time limit which averages out to about 59.62 miles a day. Each morning Shamita was driven to the course where, following the format created by Sri Chinmoy, she would start at 6 am and run until midnight then take a rest for 6 hours and return to the course the following morning. For 18 hours a day, supported by friends, family and well-wishers, Shamita completed the distance on November in 51 days, 3 hours and 8 seconds.

Ultrarunning World wondered how Shamita managed to complete such a journey.





*How has Sri Chinmoy's Path and philosophy helped with your ultrarunning?*

In 1991 I seriously started to meditate on Sri Chinmoy's Path. Sri Chinmoy, being an ambitious runner himself, taught and communicated running as an important part in the spiritual life. Running plays a unique role for his students. It is not just physical fitness. Running brings all our inner "family members": body, vital, mind and heart into alignment. It helps to envision how they all run together like obedient, enthusiastic horses in front of a divine chariot, to reach the ultimate goal: "self-realisation", or the answer to the age-old question: "Who am I?"

*How did it help you when things got difficult?*

While running long distances, day after day, you are able to dig deeper and deeper to find all the answers that seem to be important in life for a sincere God-seeker. Running 3,100 miles as such is less a sportive event, but a long spiritual journey. So many divine qualities come to the fore such as willpower, consecrated discipline, self-transcendence, purification of the mind and vital, a high sacrifice to a higher purpose or goal, unconditional self-giving, determination, stamina, endurance, obedience to the divine will within us and many more.

*How did you lift yourself when your energy was low?*

During the race my main concern was to get in perfect connection with the divinity in myself, my soul. Gracefully I experienced a short moment where I was able to envision my Soul... tremendous light. This is the source of all the energy I required during the race. Whenever the necessary energy to move forward was missing, I dived deep within and prayerfully tried to enter in a meditative state of consciousness, which is a divine surrender to the Divine Will.

This race cannot be run with muscle power. It can be run only with the heart.

Sri Chinmoy's songs contain a very special lightful power and energy that enabled me to continue even when my body was terribly tired and exhausted.

*How did your running community (the Centre and anyone else) help?*

Every day my friends supported me by calling me on the mobile phone, singing for me, sending me inspirational



thoughts and feelings, which is a tremendous energy supply. From my spiritual friends I received lots of encouragement when they came to visit me at the running place, talking and laughing together. Listening to their life stories made the time pass faster. This race is so long and pretty tough for the mind, since the mind is used to constantly gathering information the whole life. This silent stop of impressions and this emptiness is a supreme purification, but a hard time for the mind to go through. While chatting with my friends I felt the tiniest spark of energy off them, which I could immediately manifest into my running movements.

*Did or do any runners inspire you?*  
My inspiration to run this 3,100 mile race came explicitly from within, from my spiritual Master Sri Chinmoy.

*Can you talk about your running history and how you arrived at this point, running 3100 solo?*

28 years ago, in 1993, I participated for the first time in a multi-day race in New York with a distance of 700 miles and the following year 1,000 miles.

*Is it true you nearly died in New York? What did you learn from that experience?*  
My ultrarunning career stopped abruptly in 1996 when I had a near-death experience situation. Diagnosed with brain edema, I was kept in an artificial coma for three days, expected and prognosed not to survive according to the present medical staff in the hospital.

God had different plans for me! Sadly my ultra-long-distance running reached its final point. I thought, I will never ever run more than a marathon. 17 years later, in 2013, I felt a strong divine inner call to start running long dis-

tances again. My comeback started with a 10-day race in New York, organised by the Sri Chinmoy marathon team. In 2016 I participated in The Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence 3,100 mile race in New York. Due to the tremendous heat of 39°C and 90% humidity, I was not able to continue and finish this running event.

This was the tipping point where my solo runs started.

My first solo run was from Vienna (my current home) through the whole country of Austria to my birthplace Bregenz (738km), followed by a 16-day run from Vienna to Paris (1,200km) in 2019, crossing Germany. These were the first races leaving the running circles and moving from A to B!

I much enjoyed the freedom of organising and making up my own running rules and regulations. Still, my concern to run 100km every day during these European-crossing races as Sri Chinmoy suggested, never left me.

A year later, in 2020, I started a 3,100km race in Vienna (video on Youtube).

Finally, encouraged by my inner voice, I dared to start the 3,100 mile race (5,000km), the longest street race in the world, in the fall of 2021, solo. We measured a loop of 0.99km distance close to my home for this running event.

*Do you have a coach or someone to advise you?*

My only coach and adviser is my spiritual Master Sri Chinmoy. My supreme inspiration to run these races is to grow and transcend all kinds of human limits.

*What were the key elements of your diet and dietary strategy?*

Most of my friends are surprised how I get energy from my vegan food, no sugar, and mostly raw food like fruits and vegetables, nuts, pretzels and sourdough bread. Special filtered water and JUVO, a natural, raw meal whole-food drink, were my liquids. Only in the evening did my husband cook me a meal, mainly vegetables and potatoes to refill the tanks!

In my last races I noticed that eating cooked food did not supply me with the expected energy.

*What kind of shoes work best for you?*  
After 10 days' running, the shoe, Brooks Glycerin 18, "made the race". This means this shoe created less pain in my body. My friends managed to get 10 additional Brooks Glycerin 18s from the internet, even though this model was already "outrun".

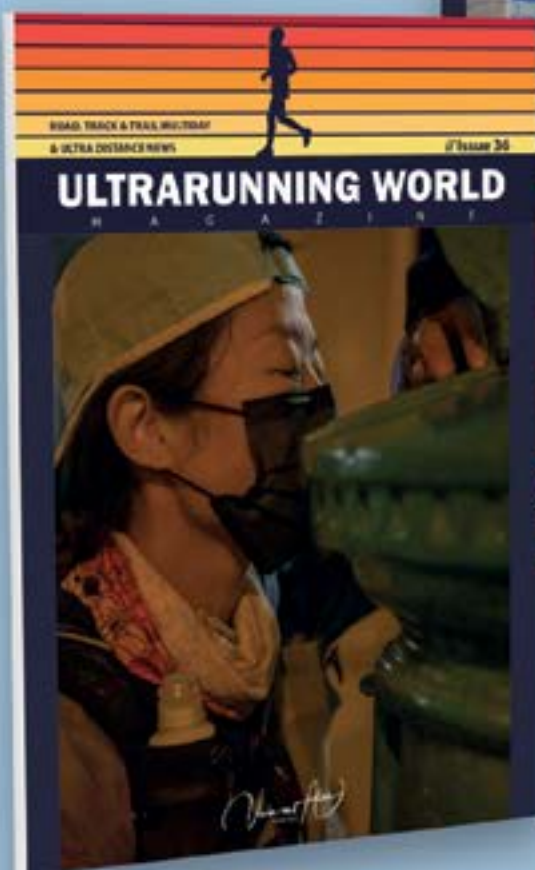
*How did you recover from the run?*  
After the race I recovered quite quickly since I did not develop any injuries. A week after my finish I got ready to go for a little jog. It is said that the recovery time lies between four and six months altogether, physically, emotionally and mentally. Still it is important to continue running gently while listening to the body and never pushing.

*How long will you continue to run, do you have any more projects lined up?*  
My inspiration to contribute something to this world is very strong, and if it is God's will I could imagine going again to the starting line to challenge myself in another 3,100 mile race. To get an impression of the run, please watch my short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQU0Rhffolk&t=234s>







**Ultrarunning World** is an independent magazine written by ultrarunners for ultrarunners. Since 2007 Ultrarunning World has published race reports from some of the greatest to the more modest ultra and multiday events around the globe.

Ultrarunning World informs and distributes information about all aspects of ultrarunning for the benefit of runners, crews, organisers, supporters and support services.

Anyone can contribute to the UW community by volunteering an article, a race report or getting involved in the production of the magazine.

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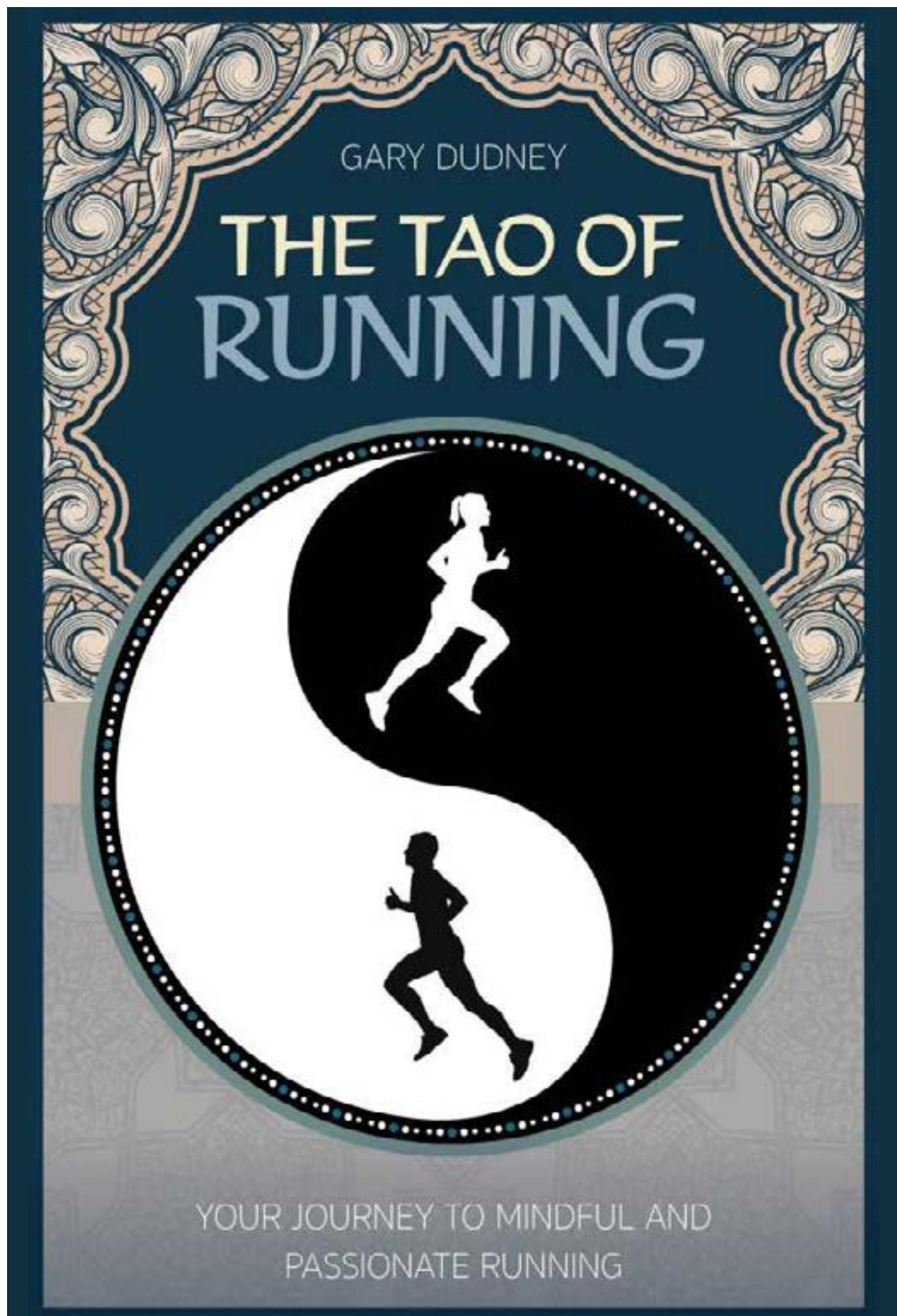


[editor@ultrarunningworld.co.uk](mailto:editor@ultrarunningworld.co.uk)



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## Review:

### The Tao of Running

by Gary Dudney

Part of the joy of ultra running is in the scale of the challenges. Endurance runners, especially those of us who are newer to the sport, have necessarily large goals. The idea that some day I'll run for 100 miles in one go is a huge target. So I can't help but admire ambition. Ultrarunning fanatic Gary Dudney sets out a somewhat lofty ambition at the start of this book. Comparing jumping off a kitchen chair (our everyday mundane running experience) with the distinctly different experience of doing a bungee jump, Dudney writes: "The running experience you're going to have after you read this book will be like the bungee jump. You are going to learn how to *think* about running and how to appreciate all of the rich possibilities inherent in running." That's quite some promise. But I'm in!

Having lost some of my running mojo since the turn of the year, I'm excited to read a book which promises to take me on a journey towards "mindful and passionate running". But while I found this a very readable, and in parts, both useful and relatable book, I'm not sure that Dudney really delivered on the high ambition he sets in these opening pages.

Full disclosure, my issues began with the book's title. The editors of Ultrarunning World weren't to know that they'd given a book which frames itself around references to Taoism, Buddhism and contemporary Western philosophies, to a runner who happens to have an MA in 'Religions of Asia and Africa'. Being the nerd that I am, the first thing I did upon picking up the book was to look for the writer's qualifications. And here begins the problem. There is no biography. I don't know who Gary Dudney is. And while the book is mainly autobiographical, he offers no attempt to qualify his expertise as a philosopher, scholar of religions nor even as a running coach.

We find out towards the end of the book that Dudney has run over 100 ultras, an incredible feat. No doubt he has plenty to say and much to share on the subject matter. Dudney's teachable moments are pulled from numerous anecdotes based on the many races he has undertaken, including Leadville (multiple attempts), Western States and the Georgia Jewel 100. As an avid watcher of YouTube running films, I've seen the pros make light work of these famous races. So to read an amateur athlete's in-depth experience over these epic courses was enjoyable and enlightening. I'll tilt my cap to anyone who has completed such gruelling races and gladly read all about their adventures.

Early chapters on 'staying relentlessly positive' and 'running and mindfulness' are packed with useful tips that would help any runner stay the course, regardless of distance, although it is written with ultra runners in mind. The thing is, none of these tips have anything to do with Taoism. In fact, the movie *Rocky* is analysed in greater depth than the religion mentioned in the book's title. 'Tao' might be translated as 'path', 'method' or 'way', so in calling this book 'The Tao of Running' Dudney's intention seemed to be to focus on 'the way of running'. Throughout the book, the reader is reminded of the importance of the journey and the process involved, rather than focusing on end goals and results. Always a useful reminder, but a little misleading if you picked up this book believing you'll learn something about the ancient Chinese religion of Taoism.

In Chapter 8, Dudney turns his attention towards the significance of trail running (versus road running). Rightly pointing out the many advantages of training on trails rather than roads or the track. His descriptions of his own training sessions in this chapter are some of my favourite parts of the book. The epic training sessions he has dreamt up seem every bit as exciting as the big race itself; another reminder that the journey, not the PBs, is the most important part of being a runner. The following chapter on the wisdom of rest is an important subject matter, one too often overlooked in books on ultrarunning. Finally, a Taoist principle is given a brief mention here, yin and yang, but without any real explanation of what these terms actually mean.

Out of nowhere, in Chapter 11 we are hit over the head with the concept of Existentialism, a 20th century European philosophy that bears little resemblance to the book's starting point in the ancient Chinese tradition of Taoism. While it isn't that I don't find the combination of philosophy and running exciting (I really do, more of this please!), this chapter feels at odds with the rest of the book. Until now, bar the odd mention of Eastern religions, the book has been mostly practical, not philosophical, rooted in storytelling and advice rather than theory.

Throughout the book, Dudney writes with humour and generosity, his authentic passion for running is clear and it makes for an engaging read. His stories from some of the most gruelling ultra races in North America (perhaps in the world?) make for compelling reading to anyone with a keen interest in trail running and ultra marathons. Dudney's hope to express the higher qualities of running, considering the whys, the highs, and the mind over the body, is certainly a worthwhile exploration. Yet it has limited success within the flow and structure of this book. If you love a lively story from the race course and the wisdom of a seasoned ultrarunner, this is an entertaining read. But if you're hoping for a deep dive into the philosophy of running or wanting to find out more about Taoism, while in the context of a running book, I'm afraid you might be disappointed.

Char Binns

## **Book review: The Tao of running by Gary Dudney**

Reviewed by Antonio Codina

Gary Dudney is a very prolific writer and a very keen ultrarunner, with many articles published in running magazines and a long list of 100 mile races on his CV. I found his book, *The Tao of Running*, a very interesting and unusual read, where he takes us through his running career and his development into a mindful runner. The book is a combination of short stories in the form of race reports and tools for runners to be more positive, mindful and passionate when training and racing.

I really enjoyed the tone of the book and the concepts explained. His passion for running is enormous and he writes about the reasons why so many people take on running, or want to run marathons or ultramarathons. I really enjoyed how he explains the effect of running in the human mind, taking you away from daily worries and more in touch with nature and yourself.

He also explains concepts of Taoism, the ancient Chinese philosophy that encourages people to accept things as they are and go with the flow and how this can be used while running, either in training or during races. The examples used in the book made me think of my own experiences and the way I approach difficult moments in ultras.

One of my favourite parts is how the author advocates practising mindfulness while running. Although I have read about mindfulness I had never tried it before reading the book. Gary made it sound interesting and I found myself trying to stay focused on the present while out running. I would tune to the sound of my steps and from there to the singing of birds that I had not appreciated that way before.

I really liked his stories of mythical races such as Leadville or Western States and other not so well known races in the US. His descriptions of the trails, the good and bad moments are quite special. He is not an elite runner, so his stories will resonate with the average athlete that attempts 50 or 100 mile races. He links his running experiences with the philosophical ideas of the book in a very skilful way.

I only found that some chapters of the book felt like short stories not always totally connected. Different chapters talk about the benefits of running long distances for older people, running friendships or the amazing experience of running a 100 mile race. I guess this has the advantage of making different parts of the book more appealing to different people, from experienced ultra runners to people considering doing their first marathon or starting to run in trails. No matter what your running experience or objective is you will probably find a section in the book that will intrigue and inspire you to become more thoughtful in your next run. It definitely made me think about why I run and the way running influences my life.



## The Tao Of Running

Reviewed by Helen Hayes

Gary Dudney is a lifelong runner who can also write. He takes the reader with him from the couch to many hundreds of miles in forensic, erudite literary detail.

The advantage for the reader is that at times tortuous descriptions of the physical and mental aspects of running are only appearing in the reader's mind, the body is still on the couch.

An explanation of the transcendent process, a runner may be blessed with, is eloquently described. I particularly appreciated Gary's sharing of his personal experience of a seminal transcendental episode whilst out running. When his strong sensations disappeared into the world and he felt connected to all things, he attained a state of flow.

Beginning with the Tao (pronounced "Dow") and applying a simple vinegar analogy, Gary has a knack of distilling complex world views into usable cheerful chunks. I have rarely encountered a clearer explanation of existentialism in any other publication. Do not be discouraged by philosophical terms, Gary writes in a colloquial style accessible to all.

He bursts into a dramatic story of a 100 mile race, crushingly canceled at mile 90, tension building, echoing the challenges he faced in the race. He is a gifted storyteller and the reader is able to traverse this book without difficulty and with some attention.

"The aid stations kept appearing out of the dark like cheap bars on ruined streets and then disappearing behind us like jilted lovers." Hunter S. Thompson take a bow. He goes on to reference DH Lawrence and Nietzsche in an entirely apposite approach to the art of running.

There are a couple of observations. The book is written from an American perspective with descriptions of their heritage races such as Leadville, Western States and the history of these races. This should not be a barrier to any reader because ultimately running is a universal activity, applicable to all humans regardless of imaginary boundaries such as nationality.

The photos are in black and white, I would have enjoyed them more in colour but this is a minor gripe in the overall benefits the book brings.

Gary gives us a "workable strategy for when the chips were really down." This is a particularly illuminating and useful chapter. He mentions JoAnn Dahlkoetter, "Your Performing Edge" on how to think about running. A simple strategy such as a mantra, a word or sentence repeated over and over again can help. Above all relaxation, how to relax into the Tao, the immediate Now when out running.

I appreciated a dissection of Gary's thought processes during pain and how he applied strategies to effectively deal with the physical and mental aspects. A detailed analysis of how he embraced the pain so it lost its powerful diverting energy is a tool I could apply immediately to my movement.

I would recommend this book to anyone, whether a runner of any distance or no distance at all. The universal lessons Gary learnt through running can be applied to any human being. It's also a thoroughly good read... on the couch.

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**Antonio Codina**

I am a runner based in the North East of England. My sporting background is in mountaineering and rock climbing, and I started running ultras four years ago. This probably explains my interest in mountain and winter races such as TDS, Lakeland or the Spine races. My dream race is Tor de Géants.



**Amy Lomax**

Having always loved to run since my school days, I did my first marathon on 13.09.2009. I found it quite hard, but persevered with one or two a year until 2013, and then got a bit addicted, and started doing more and going further. I have run 209 official marathons altogether, including 72 ultras and 8 x 100 milers. I love running, and when think of the things I have gained from it – friends, exploration, fitness, confidence, and a tool for my mental health – I can't think of a better hobby! I work as an NHS dietitian in London, and also as a sports dietitian and you can find more details on my website [Amylomax-dietitian.com](http://Amylomax-dietitian.com).



**Sarah Marshall**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016 at the age of 47 I took the leap from half marathons straight to an ultra. 2 years later I celebrated my 100<sup>th</sup> marathon. Since November 2016 I've run 234 marathons; 86 of those are ultras which include 14 x 100 milers.



**Casey Edlington**

My name is Casey Edlington. I am a 33 year old Christian, wife, mother of two and kindy teacher. I started running three years ago and quickly fell in love with running; trail ultra running to be specific. Running has gifted me strength, confidence, a wonderful group of friends and the opportunity to be a positive role model for my family and others.



**Char Binns**

Is a runner and writer with a funny accent. Brung up in West Yorkshire, she spent 9 years in That London before escaping back up North. She's lived in Liverpool for 4 years and even has a Mersey ferry tattoo. But living somewhere flat and urban restricts her ultra training and she often finds herself running laps of the same incline (sometimes up to 20 times a morning!). Char is Top Dog at Bookhounds, the club for people who love running and reading.



**Chis Evans**

34, Edinburgh UK. Started running in 2018 after joining a local group for a run and a few beers to make new friends. I run to have fun and explore new places, completing my first ultra solo in August '21 after being un-inspired by the route for the race option. I now co-run EH3-Milers, hosting free weekly runs to bars and breweries around the city & beyond while slowly pushing myself further into the ultra world.

@chris.runs.a.lap / @eh3milers

## Contributors



**Francesca Goodwin**

Is an ultrarunner based in the Midlands, UK. She has run since she realised that team sports were not for her at school, but it was not until she turned 30 that she started running further and further. Having never raced so much as a 5km, she entered her first 40 miler and came second lady. By the next morning, she'd signed up for an 84 mile self-navigated coastal night ultra, this time coming first lady. When she's not running, Francesca works as a teacher and is Head of Wellbeing at her school. She is a mental health advocate and promotes the benefits of endurance running for anxiety and depression.



**Gareth Chadwick**

Is a journalist and copywriter. In the breaks between injuries, he is also a keen runner and ran his first ultra, the 35-mile Gritstone Grind in Cheshire, UK, in September 2020.



**Andrew Meehan**

Has been a member of Donadea Running Club for almost ten years. I am a lecturer in Electronic Engineering in Maynooth University for the past 14 years and took up running as a fitness aid. I ran my first 50K on a dare and haven't looked back since! I run all distances and have been pacer at the Dublin city Marathon on a number of occasion, as well as other races around the country. I regularly crew for long races for my fellow club members.



**Jaide Downs**

Is a wife, mother, and small business owner in the rural corner of south-eastern Oregon. When not working or spending time with her family, she enjoys running and exploring what the high desert has to offer. Her favorite races are fixed time events, as she enjoys connecting with other racers.



**Lorna Cullen**

I'm 51, married with a son, stepson and step-daughter. I've been running for nearly 10 years and cycling and swimming for 6 years. I'm lucky enough to live on the edge of the Peak District with beautiful places to cycle and run on my doorstep. My husband and I also enjoy visiting Mallorca once a year for cycling and running. When I'm not doing sport I enjoy painting, good food and writing my blog :-). [Lornatri.wordpress.com](https://lornatri.wordpress.com)



**Matt Parker**

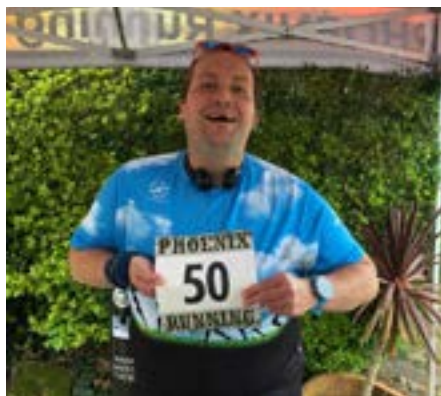
The grumpy runner, Matt Parker, writes about ultra-running. His other job is parenting a small human. Matt took on a Couch to 60k challenge in 2016 – after years of drinking, smoking and other misadventures. He's completed around 25 ultras since – including the Thames Path 100 in 2021. [grumpy-runner.com](https://grumpy-runner.com)





**Pietro Andrianopoli**

Has lived in London since 2016 and works as project manager in the construction industry. He started running a few years ago to lose weight after a bad injury playing football. Trail running is his preferred style of running although, living in the city, most of his training is done in a flat and urban environment.



**Rob Cowlin**

As a member of the 100 Marathon Club, I've gone from obese couched potato to endurance running obsessive. Seeking greater challenge and adventure, I've found myself going further and longer and now have over 10 x 100-mile finishes. I've failed, triumphed and learned that when it really counts, deep down inside, I just don't know how to give up.



**Sam McCready**

Is a Kiwi ultrarunner currently living in Perth, Western Australia. He is 52, married with two teenage daughters and works in energy marketing. In his spare time, he has run a number of ultras from 50 km to 100 miles. He jokes that he is a 'middle of the pack at best' runner.



**Sarah Meegan**

Is a keen long distance runner and runs with Dunboyne Athletics Club based Co. Meath, Ireland. Sarah is a lecturer in Physical Education and Sports Science and Health at Dublin City University so running and exercise are a huge part of her professional and personal life.



**Shamita Achenbach-König**

A mother and cellist from Vienna, Shamita Achenbach-König has been running ultramarathons for over 25 years. Her history includes 10 day, 700 mile and 1000 mile finishes and recently adventure ran from Vienna to Paris; a distance of 1200km.

A meditation student of Sri Chinmoy, Shamita views ultra-distance running as part of her spiritual practice, a way to push aside the mind's doubts and limitations. She is one of the main people featured in the recent documentary 3100: Run and Become, an exploration of the spiritual side of long distance running.



**John Burns**

Is a writer and editor from Nottingham in the UK, now residing in Yunnan in China's mountainous southwest. He spends his time running, hiking and climbing around Yunnan province. After five years in Yunnan, he's just about getting used to the altitude.



# ULTRARUNNING WORLD

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